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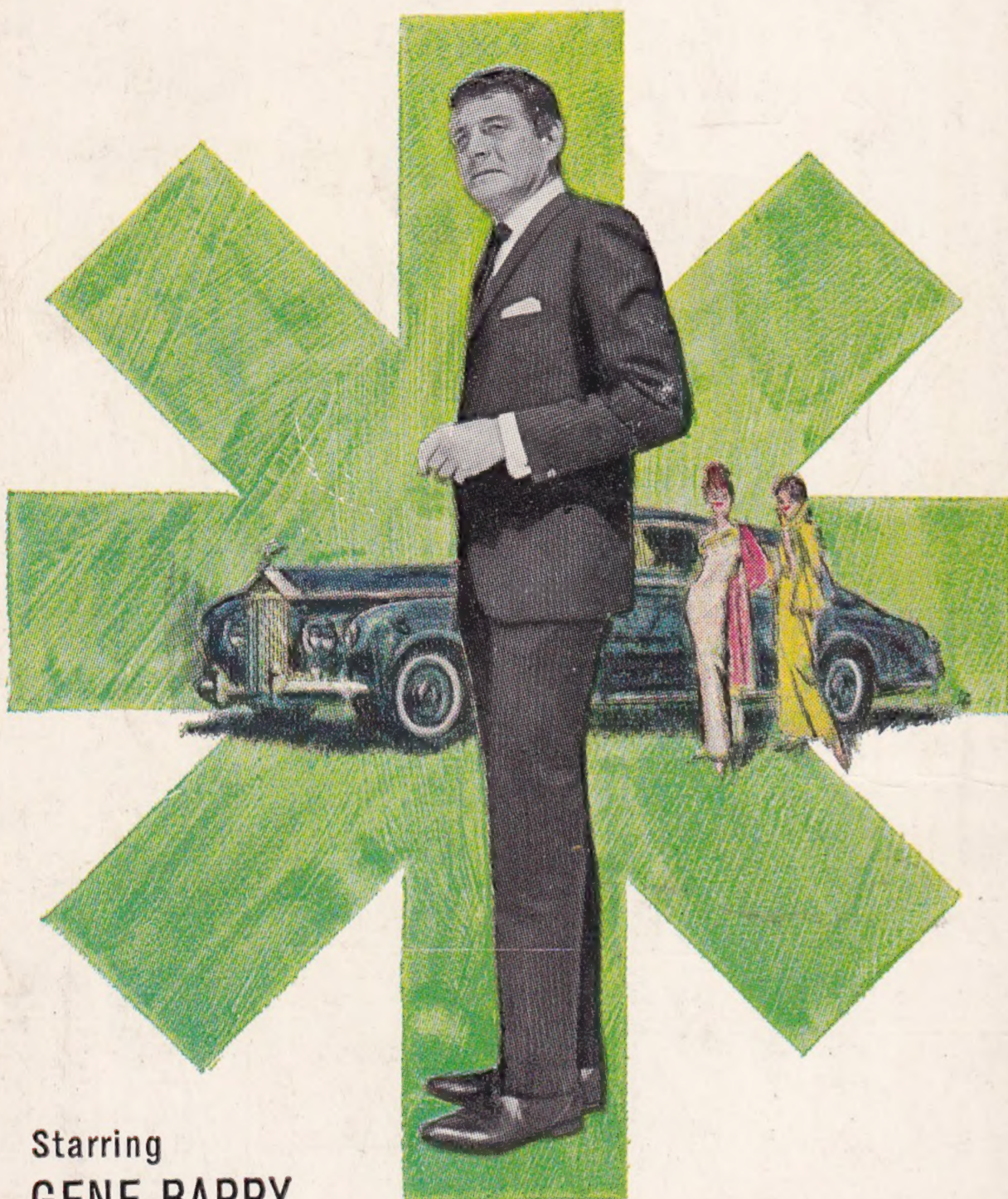
PERMABOOK EDITION M-4310

AN ORIGINAL EDITION

WHO KILLED BEAU SPARROW?

AN ORIGINAL NOVEL BY ROGER FULLER

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the millionaire cop of ABC-TV's
***BURKE'S LAW*,**
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murder.



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**WHO
KILLED
BEAU
SPARROW
?**

Roger Fuller



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WHO KILLED BEAU SPARROW?

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Who Killed Beau Sparrow?

ONE

I.

Victor Haggerty's worst enemy—and I personally knew several dozen men who claimed that distinction—had to admit one thing: when Victor threw a party it was a real bash.

I had heard somewhere that the sole duty of a high-salaried member of Haggerty Industries' public relations office was to supply the most beautiful, most complaisant girls this side of Vegas for Victor's little *soirées*. By the fairness of the flesh decorating the poolside area of the ostentatious Haggerty estate that Sunday afternoon when I dropped in, the P.R. boy did a conscientious job. The buffet was delicious, the Scotch was Chivas Regal and the weather was fine for swimming: the party had all the ingredients.

I wasn't there to swim but I was glad that all the girls were, at least to the point of stepping into swim suits. If they could be called suits; whatever the diminutive of the word

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"bikini" is, that's what they had on. Precariously, barely covering the three important salients.

No, I wasn't there to swim, although ordinarily I would have enjoyed splashing around a pool with such a brave assemblage of lads and lassies who ostensibly had been gathered to celebrate the fact that somebody was out to murder the host, Victor Haggerty.

That was Haggerty's idea, not mine. Privately, I feared that our Victor had finally graduated from the worst case of hypochondria known to medical science to the fringes of psychasthenia, which would have been a shame, in a way: all that power, all that dough, all that lovely wife, Liz, all the reasons the average man would have had for being happy with his lot, and Victor dodging shadows. Such irony. Such delayed justice—or maybe I shouldn't have entertained that last thought.

"You and Haggerty were college buddies or something, weren't you, Amos?" the Inspector asked me when he called me in about Victor's letter, outlining his fears. "Why didn't he come to you with this?"

The Inspector, God bless him, thought anybody in the Department who might have graduated from an accredited college or university automatically became the fraternity brother of every other human being who had earned a college degree. Victor Haggerty had graduated from U.C.L.A., I think it was, around 1944; I was Amherst, '48.

"Victor's father and my old man were pretty close at one time, 'way back when," I said, "but I wouldn't call myself his close friend. Matter of fact, I don't think Victor Haggerty has any close friends. He's a pretty hard man to like very much."

The Inspector has a way of looking at anyone who disagrees with his preconceived notions as though he were a dirty traitor. He gave me one of those looks now and cleared his throat, something that came close to being a grunt.

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"You've been out to that big place of his, haven't you, Captain Burke?" he asked. *Amos, a minute ago; Captain Burke now.* "You knew his wife before he married her, didn't you? You've played golf with him and gone sailing on his boat and eaten at his table, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "But Victor has to have a lot of people around him. He enjoys playing the *padrone*, I suppose, or—hmm."

He gave me another look. "More psychology, Captain?" He could put more contempt into that one word than anybody I ever knew, even a dry-fly dude speaking of a cut-bait fisherman.

I'd been just about to say that in spite of all his millions, his companies and combinations of companies, the power he swung in high places and low, Victor Haggerty was so lacking in self-confidence that he had to give these extravagant husking bees to buy approval from the freeloaders who flocked to them, but after that look the Inspector gave me, I decided to keep my mouth shut.

"No, sir," I said lamely. "I guess Haggerty just likes to throw parties. Maybe it helps him forget the three dozen assorted diseases he imagines he's dying from."

The Inspector looked down at the letter in his big, splayed hand. "And maybe you think this letter he wrote the Commissioner could be more of the same, eh?" he asked. "Maybe this guy is a little jerky from overwork or too many parties or something. Or maybe he's one of those luses, the drink finally turns on them and they start hearing voices making up plots against their life."

"God no, not Victor Haggerty," I said. "The last time I saw him he was drinking tepid water. Said his latest tests had proved that icewater was bad for his liver, or was it his kidneys?"

"He might have something there," the Inspector said seriously. "Me, I take a glass of water it's too cold or a beer

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or even ice cream sometimes and bingo, right between the eyes like I'm stabbed." He paused and added thoughtfully, "Of course, my liver isn't up there next to my eyes, or my kidneys, either."

"No, sir," I said respectfully. He caught himself about to embark on a dissertation concerning the placement of his vital organs and got sore at himself for going up this blind alley.

"Well, get yourself invited to this whatchacallit, pool party, he's throwing next Sunday afternoon, Captain," he said irritably. "The Commissioner wants action, so talk to him, find out what's going on—or anyway what he thinks is going on that he should write letters to the Commissioner saying somebody's planning on putting him down."

"Yes, sir," I said in Captain Amos Burke's best subordinate voice, and got out of the office.

Down in the Homicide squadroom, my best friend and severest critic, Detective Sergeant Les Hall, was sitting at a table with Tim Tilson, the kid who will be Chief of Detectives some day if his overeagerness doesn't get him hurt too badly. They were playing gin behind a screen of file folders. When I walked in, Les deftly swept the cards into an open drawer under his elbows, bellied the drawer shut and said very officially, ". . . and this angle was never checked out as well as it should have been, Tim. You can see by the —oh, hello, Captain."

Big surprise that I should be walking in, when both of them had been suffering from the eagers for the past half-hour, waiting to hear why the Inspector had called me to his office in such a hurry. They knew I wasn't the Inspector's favorite person for one reason or another and I suppose Les subconsciously half-hoped that I'd been chewed out. Les was intensely loyal to me but secretly he disapproved of the un-G.I. way I ran Homicide. He was reared in the old tradition and to have a Captain of Homicide who didn't

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even chew cigars was a situation he bore up under bravely, if fretfully on occasion. As for Tilson, I could see by his face that he was afraid I'd played it too brash with the Inspector that once-too-often he warned me about and might now be on my way to Missing Persons.

"Anything doing, Captain?" Les finally asked after I made a production out of lighting a cigarette; let 'em stew. "Did the Inspector want to see you about the Mason job, maybe?"

"Unh-unh," I said and asked, in turn: "What was the dope on the case of that kid actress trying to shake down Victor Haggerty on a statutory rape deal years ago, Les? You worked on that before you came over to Homicide, didn't you?"

Hall wrinkled his nose as though smelling something bad. "Yeah, I worked that job," he nodded. "Never felt very good about it, either. The girl's name was Vicki Vanoy, real name Annette Venacci. She called herself an actress but she was just a pretty kid with no brains and a yen to be a second Marilyn Monroe—she even made herself up to look like Monroe, I remember. She was waving her fanny in a little grind spot when Victor Haggerty dropped in on one of his slumming trips, I guess. Haggerty took her to a hotel and—I dunno what happened there but it wound up with the hotel dick investigating a lot of screaming and yelling. He found this rich guy, Haggerty, and the blonde together, the kid saying he tried to rape her—she was sixteen—and Haggerty claiming it was a frame-up, that Vicky put on the act when he refused to give her five grand to keep quiet."

"And the judge believed Haggerty?" I asked.

He wrinkled his nose again. "Uh-huh. I always thought—but who cares what I thought? Haggerty wouldn't let the case be taken care of quietly; said unless he bore down hard it might look as though he really had tried to force the kid,

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something like that. Anyway, what was Vicki Vanoy going to do against a multimillionaire and the weight he could swing? We had a different administration in those days and—well, maybe the judge wasn't venal, only stupid; don't ask me. She got five-to-ten for attempted extortion and they stuck her in a reformatory upstate."

He put up a hand to scratch the side of his balding head. "When they took her out of the courtroom after sentencing, she turned on Haggerty—oh, yes, he was there to see that justice was done, I guess—and she said something like: 'Mister, wherever you are when I get out, you'd better hide because I'm going to get back at you for this, but good.' And Haggerty laughed at her. I remember him laughing at her and I wondered at the time why all the wrong guys got all the breaks."

"How long ago was this?" I asked.

Les shrugged. "Ten years, fifteen years ago, somewhere in there. But Vicki Vanoy only served twenty-two months, if that's what you want to know: she got her full good-time, of course. If Victor Haggerty is all of a sudden scared that somebody's out to stop him laughing, remind him that the blonde's been out a long time so why should she make a move at his late date?"

"I didn't say Victor Haggerty was afraid that somebody was out to stop him laughing," I said.

"So the Inspector calls you up to his office and you come back down and ask about the old shakedown case and this is Homicide and it doesn't figure that way, Captain?" Les Hall asked with a grin. "Like the Minsk to Pinsk story, it's obvious."

"Okay, maybe Haggerty is hearing things go bump in the night," I admitted. "Where's Vicki Vanoy now?"

Les's shoulders moved again. "I don't know. As soon as she got out from under probation she was free to go anywhere she liked. Maybe she forgot all about being a second Mari-

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lyn Monroe and met a decent guy and married him and now she's raising a flock of kids in Rockford, Illinois. I sure hope so."

This Vicki Vanoy angle admittedly was not much, probably nothing at all, especially since I hadn't yet seen Victor Haggerty to find out the first thing about the reasons behind his letter to the cops. Still, it was a little something and it could break up that gin rummy game, at least. Tilson couldn't afford to play gin with Les Hall.

"Suppose you two see what you can find out about the little blonde," I suggested. "Find out if she's still in town or where she went if she left. There's probably nothing to it but it's a nice day out."

"Haggerty thinks Vicki Vanoy is on the shoot for him?" Les asked. "Why Vicki, especially? From what I hear, Haggerty's bolluxed up so many lives it's a wonder he's still walking around."

"I don't know that it's Vicki he's afraid of," I said. "It could very possibly be his own febrile imagination—"

"Spik Engliss pliz, Captain."

"Feverish, distorted," I explained. "Ever since he was old enough to shake his own pills out of a bottle, Victor Haggerty's been sure he was about to die from something, and soon."

"With his dough," Tim put in, "he must be a doctor's delight."

"Not the way I hear it," I said. "He changes doctors like you change socks, usually when he thinks the one currently on the payroll is trying to poison him."

"Charming gent," Tilson said.

"Mostly a case of too much money handed him too early in life," I said pontifically.

"Look who's talking," Les said.

"There will be more respect for superiors from subordi-

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nates in this bureau or Traffic Survey will get some new blood," I said firmly, and started for the door.

"Yes, sir, Captain Amos Burke, sir," they chorused. Well, at least they had the grace not to laugh until I was out in the hall.

2.

I had no trouble getting an invitation to Victor Haggerty's pool party. I really needed none. It might sound unforgivably conceited unless you knew Haggerty, but Victor would have been glad to have me drop in on one of his wingdings uninvited at any time, feeling that my presence might give the joint some class, so to speak.

Which should give you an idea of how hard up Haggerty was for party guests who were neither employees who *had* to be there, people who wanted favors, plain out-and-out freeloaders, nor hired help such as the band and most of the gorgeous gals. In this instance, Haggerty didn't know I was coming on official business. I'd simply called one Miss Samson, Victor's private secretary's private secretary (the secretaries in the main Haggerty office had their own echelons) and asked if Mr. Haggerty would be free to see Amos Burke at home on Sunday afternoon. Miss Samson said she'd check and call be back: the return call came through within five minutes and Miss Samson said Mr. Haggerty would be delighted to have me join a little pool party he had arranged for Sunday afternoon.

Little? There must have been twenty cars parked along the sweeping drive and in the wide apron that led back to the garages when I got there. I told Henry he could go along

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home; I'd call him when I was ready to leave. Henry heard happy feminine sounds coming from the pool area, the distinct crash of a glass landing on tile, and said, half to himself: "It probably will be quite a while, eh, Captain?"

I followed his look and half-nod and saw a girl in an off-white bikini (or at least I presumed the thin white stripes on her tan were bikini) break out from between two high oleander clumps, hotly pursued by a young man who had a tan to match the girl's, and all over muscles. Just before they disappeared from view, boy caught girl and picked her up to bear her back into the bushes, struggling playfully, squealing rapturously.

"It does look that way, doesn't it, Henry?" I murmured.

He took the Rolls on down the driveway, looking over his shoulder in hopes he could see behind the bushes from a new angle, and I looked up at the façade of Victor Haggerty's mansion. I use the detestable word advisedly: in this day and age of architectural good taste, this monstrosity was an abomination comparable in vulgarity only to San Simeon. It somewhat resembled a Loew theater of the twenties. Whoever Victor had chosen to build his place had taken Georgian and mated it to Tudor with a splash of Byzantine thrown in. There were towers and cupolas scattered here and there, pillars, stained glass, Baroque vaults, Gothic buttresses—you name it and *Versez Souci* (of course!) had it. In profusion.

I debated only a second or two over the advisability of presenting myself at the front door, or perhaps main entrance was the better word, and decided against it: the odds were prohibitive that Victor was at the pool, either stimulating his metabolism by viewing the flesh his P.R. man had imported for the occasion or taking refuge from his enemy, real or imagined, in the crowd he had summoned here this bright and shiny Sunday afternoon.

I'd been there many times before and so I knew which

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one of the wandering walkways that led off the entrance plaza would take me to the pool and not to the greenhouses, the stables, the kennels, the boat moorings or, possibly, the miniature Fontainebleau that served as *Versez Souci's* servants' quarters. I started down a walk that twisted between immaculately groomed shrubbery in the general direction of the happy hubbub ahead and my way took me around the corner of the right wing of the tremendous pile that Victor built. The sound of Schumann's "Fantasie," played by a stereo with all the stops out, made me look up at the second-floor window from which that beautiful music was pouring its melodious defiance to the clash and clatter from the pool.

One of the six windows at the end of the wing was open and as I glanced aloft I caught the barest glimpse of a woman peering down at me. Liz Haggerty? It almost had to be but it wasn't the Liz I'd last seen about a year ago. She had been a handsome, gracious woman who had not let Victor's gaucheries or even his oblique insults do more than pinch her smile at the corners: the brief glimpse I caught of the face in the second floor window showed me a taut, shadow-eyed ghost with a rat's nest of hair who peeped down at me, half-raised a hand and then turned—*fled!*—from the window.

Now, what the hell? I asked myself. *Is Victor's killer threatening both of them?*

I said no to that as soon as I looked at my own question. Liz knew the line of work I followed (I think she was one of the few people in what might be euphemistically called "our set" who really believed I was a cop) and our relationship had always been cordial. I felt almost sure that if she were being threatened by anyone she'd have gotten in direct touch with me without waiting for Victor to make his appeal for protection in a letter impersonally addressed to the Police Department.

I was still looking up at the window when the bushes be-

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side my path exploded a warm bundle of redhead into my startled grasp. It was not the same dryad who had pinned Henry's gaze a couple of minutes earlier: this one wore a blue bikini which had been slightly disarranged, as though recently pawed at. This little bundle felt good, smelled fragrant and was nice to look upon as she laughed up at me, green eyes merry, young face reflecting no embarrassment at all as she pulled up the scrap of brassiere a millimeter or so to cover its escapee.

"Of all people," she crowed, "Amos Burke, himself. In person." Then she squinted up at me, wrinkling her nose. "And he doesn't remember me," she added mournfully.

I smiled down at her, riffling the cards of my mental I.D. file. "How could I forget?" I asked. "Hello, Angela." I had her pegged by that time; Angela Wyckoff, no stage name or other alias, party girl—but only the most expensive parties—with no visible means of support except those which she carried around with her at all times. But no tramp: Angela was honest and discreet, she was a funtime girl and as far as I knew she'd never let a serious thought stay in her head any longer than it took to laugh it away.

"Good for you," she exclaimed now. "Just goes to show what police training can do, giving you a memory like that. I only met you for a hot five minutes—well, it really wasn't as hot as it might have been, was it? And you remembered me, bing, like that."

"You remembered me first," I pointed out.

She gave me an exaggerated limpid stare. "That's different. No woman could ever forget you, pussycat. Handsome, richer than Onassis and with more old-fashioned sex appeal than—"

I never did hear who I beat in the sex-appeal department because at that moment the hi-fi in the room above us began blasting out Chopin's "Prelude," Opus 28, and Angela's words were buried in rich music. She cast a petulant

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glance aloft and tugged at my arm. "C'mon," she said. "We can't talk here with all that noise going on so let's go over to the pool and you can watch me practice my swan dive."

I went down the walk with Chopin beating at me from the rear. "Why practice?" I asked the little redhead. "So far as I'm concerned, your form is perfect right now."

She gave a wriggle and looked down at herself. "It's not bad, at that, is it?" she asked. "But you were sweet to remind me that I'm no hag. The competition at the pool has been something fierce and I was beginning to wonder."

"Competition? Who has Victor imported this time, Sophia Loren?"

"Almost as bad," Angela said with mock gloom. "Did you ever hear of Countess Orazzi?"

"Afraid not," I confessed. "I'm not up on my peerage, especially the Italian brand."

"Well, just you wait till you see her," my guide warned me. "She's really something. Lord knows I'm broad-minded but, honestly, Amos, the way she—"

"Whoa," I broke in. "Is this the kind and gracious, live-and-let-live little Wyckoff girl?"

She hesitated, undecided whether to laugh or get mad. She decided to laugh and this she did charmingly, squinching her nose again as she looked up at me. "Okay, darn you," she said. "But if you're a friend of Victor Haggerty's you'd better warn him that any other woman with two eyes in her head can tell that this Countess Orazzi is a man-eater."

"Victor Haggerty," I reminded her, "is a couple of days over twenty-one. He also happens to have been married for the past several years."

Angela cast a look over her bare shoulder in the direction we'd come, back toward the Chopin that still sounded over the party noises ahead. "And the loyal wife of several

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years is having her own party in her rooms, all by herself," she said. "Doesn't that give you an idea?"

"Well, maybe she doesn't approve of Sunday afternoon brawls," I said lamely. "Or perhaps she has a headache and—"

"And that's restful music?" Angela asked. "Oh, Amos, you're a policeman and you're supposed to know everything—haven't you heard that our Victor is getting ready to call it quits with Mrs. Haggerty and try a new, younger, more chic wife for kicks? Like, say, the Countess Orazzi?"

No, I hadn't heard. Of course Victor Haggerty, with his money and position, was always being rumored as about to divorce Liz but his own negative personality, his habit of being unpleasant to Liz in front of people, was to blame for that. He had treated Liz badly, or at least without affection, ever since the day they had come back from their wedding trip to the Orient but Liz had always stoutly maintained that that was just Victor's way; beneath his sarcasm and downright rudeness lay the prince of lovers.

"Hoo, boy," Angela was murmuring, "I'd sure like to be around when Victor gives Liz her pink slip. From what I hear, Mrs. H. has sworn that nobody else will get Victor, even if she has to kill him to keep him."

3.

I should have laughed out loud at the idea of the Liz Haggerty I'd known killing anybody or even hurting anyone's feelings. But somehow I didn't laugh; somehow the words of this redheaded child beside me sent a chill through me.

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Of course Angela was just babbling nonsense but I couldn't help thinking about that gaunt face I'd seen in the second-floor window. If that had been Liz—and it must have been—the Liz Haggerty I'd known had somehow been replaced by a woman I didn't know at all. I'd caught only a glimpse of that wraith's eyes but what I'd seen had looked like stark desperation.

As we walked into the pool area I asked myself *why* Liz could be so desperate: did she really love Victor Haggerty that much? There were no children to turn her into the proverbial lioness defending her cubs, so that angle was out. Money? Liz's father had gone broke right in the middle of Liz's debut and never had been able to regain his balance after that. When she married Victor, a lot of unpleasant people said Liz was doing it to get her father off the hook, save him from having some rather unorthodox financial transactions uncovered, but I was pretty sure that was bunk. And, besides, even if I was dead wrong and Liz wanted Victor Haggerty's money under any circumstances, why the desperation? With his record as a woman-chaser, she shouldn't have any trouble getting a settlement that would keep a whole pack of wolves three counties away.

"There's the Countess," Angela Wyckoff was telling me. "The body in the white sheath. How about that?"

I broke off wondering about Liz Haggerty and looked at the body in the white sheath. This was the Countess Orazzi and, as Angela had indicated, *che ragazza!* As far as I could tell, the shift was it: if the Countess had anything on under it, whatever it was left not a ridge or a wrinkle and whereas I had always understood that even sheath dresses were supposed to let their wearers' pores breathe a little, this one was about three degrees tighter than the Countess's skin.

Very few women could have worn such a dress without

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being uncomfortable lest some minuscule structural defect be brought into too bold relief. The Countess didn't have a worry in the world, at least not so far as structural defects were concerned. She was a dark-haired, dark-eyed woman with a beauty that seemed almost predatorily passionate, even at a distance. Angela had named her a man-eater: silently I endorsed the classification—but, lordy, she was a gorgeous hunk of woman!

As I watched her, the brunette undulated her way to a poolside chair and arranged herself in it, entirely careless of the way that white sheath rode north while her legs and thighs went south. That done, she looked about her, holding up one hand with the fore and second fingers together in the universal request for a cigarette. A slender, good-looking young man with a crop of wavy black hair, well built but not one of the Muscle Beach boys who were bounding about, appeared immediately to supply a cigarette and a light.

"You're a policeman," Angela said. "Can you tell if she's a real countess or a phoney, Amos?"

"Before I pass judgment I'd have to examine her patents of nobility," I explained.

She giggled. "I bet you'd like to, too. But she's supposed to be engaged to Beau Sparrow—not that it's slowing down her campaign to get Victor Haggerty in the least. That's him lighting her cigarette." And she gazed at the young man with L'Orazzi and permitted herself an instinctive *yum-yum* sound under her breath.

"I suppose I should know who Beau Sparrow is," I said, "but I don't, even though the name rings a faint bell. Actor fellah?"

"No, painter fellah."

"I place him now," I nodded. "He had a show at the Midtown Galleries a while back. I didn't make it but the critics gave him a hard time." I looked at Sparrow again. "He

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doesn't look as though the bad criticism broke his heart, exactly."

"Oh, he's got it made," Angela said. "They tell me every old woman in town is trying to get Beau Sparrow to do her portrait. And some not so old. Victor Haggerty's wife, for instance. He's doing her now."

That surprised me. Not that everyone who sits for a portrait is necessarily a vain person but almost always a woman has her portrait done because her husband or her children want her to sit, just as a man's portrait usually is the result of his wife or his board of directors pressuring him into it. In this case, I couldn't imagine Victor even thinking about having Liz's portrait painted nor could I see Liz doing it on her own.

Again I reminded myself that it had been at least a year since I had seen Liz. A lot could happen to a woman's personality in a year: she could fall recklessly and hopelessly in love, she could go on the sauce, she could finally let the grinding unpleasantness of her husband snap something inside of her and change overnight to an entirely different person.

"I tell you what," Angela Wyckoff said. "Let me take you away from all this. Suppose you ride me home in your great big gorgeous Rolls Royce and I'll fix a simple Sunday dinner and we can—hoo, boy—relax."

When I shook my head she asked, "Another date or has the Countess knocked you over from this distance?"

"Neither," I said with sincere regret. "It so happens I have to see Victor Haggerty on a business matter." When her green eyes lit up with excitement I shook my head again. "And don't go getting ideas," I warned her. "Besides being on the cops I have to take care of my father's estate, remember? Don't tell me you don't know all about that, down to the last dime."

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She stuck out the tip of her pink tongue at me. "You make me sound like a walking Dun and Bradstreet, darn you," she said. "Of course I know all about it, down to the last nickel, not dime, darling. But Amos, honey, I think I'd love you just as much if you were flat broke. I mean it."

"I've never been quite so completely flattered," I grinned. "Now run along and play. See if you can't out-glamor the Countess."

"Not a chance," Angela sighed. "I know when I'm over-matched. But I'll get out of your way, you big businessman, you. Call me soon, Amos?"

"The very first chance I get," I promised.

"Bet you don't remember my number," she said.

"I never forget a digit," I said and she romped off to try her luck (and her skill) with some of the frantically gay characters who were not muscle boys and who, therefore, must be various junior executives of Haggerty's companies, there by royal command.

I found Victor Haggerty, the man who had written my chief that somebody was out to kill him, in a cabana-type structure at the far end of the Olympic-sized pool, surrounded by what I suppose should be called a coterie. They were all seated around a table loaded with bottles of spirituous liquors and mixers, buckets of ice, platters of hors d'oeuvres and such, and although it was a round table, Victor still sat at the head of it. This he did in his usual way, interrupting anybody who tried to say anything that wasn't in answer to a question from him and exuding a sort of patronizing paternalism which could set the average man's teeth on edge at first meeting and had, for as long as I could remember.

He saw me threading my way through the half-naked merrymakers and welcomed me loudly and nasally. "Well, so you finally made it, hey, Amos?" he asked me. "I was about

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ready to send out a search party. Thought you were lost on the grounds somewhere. People often do get lost at *Versez Souci*, y'know. Been thinking of having Rand-McNally get out a map of the place."

The others at the table kept their eyes on the boss and when they were sure this was a joke they broke into too hearty laughter. All but one, that is: the ash-blond in the severe and tasteful blue-grey dress sitting beside Haggerty curved her lovely lips in faint amusement, not necessarily directed at the mirth occasioned by Haggerty's "joke."

"Sit down," Victor cried. "Have a drink. What're you taking these days, Scotch? Here." He leaned over to push the Chivas Regal toward me. "Try that. Supposed to be the best there is but I wouldn't know—it could be rotgut as far as I'm concerned. Don't touch a drop now, Burke, not a drop. Why don't you give it up? Make a new man out of you."

The temptation was there to ask Haggerty why going on the wagon hadn't changed him at all except to make a smug s.o.b. out of a slobbery s.o.b. such as Haggerty was before he made the startling discovery that he had an allergy to all grains that went into liquor, but I resisted it heroically. Besides, I wouldn't have been given a chance to make any cracks that might have come to mind: Haggerty asked the questions and then rode roughshod over all possible answers to them.

"You know everybody here, don't you?" he asked. When I shook my head he flourished a hand around the table in a careless, almost contemptuous, swoop. "Ian MacLean, Doctor MacLean," he said, and I shook hands with the prototype of all society doctors, a touch of grey at the temples, a sun-tanned square face, perfect teeth in a perfect smile, a blue flannel blazer and an ascot in the open collar of his white shirt, carelessly arranged with loving care. "Mac's the high-

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wayman who charges me too much money for worthless advice, like no more diving.”

“Diving?” I asked.

“Uh-huh, diving,” Haggerty nodded. He jerked his head in the general direction of the pool. “I was going to test-run our new Trampoboard that Charlie’s engineers threw together—my idea, even if they try to claim it—but Mac says no, too much for my bum ticker.”

“I suppose Dr. MacLean knows best,” I said, “but you look remarkably well for a man with a—”

“And this is Jean Samson,” Haggerty broke in. “You’ve certainly met her, haven’t you? She’s my whole organization.”

“I spoke with Miss Samson over the phone,” I said. “How do you do?”

The cold, cold Freya in the grey-blue dress beside Victor inclined her head and gave me what might have passed for a smile if I were easily satisfied.

“And this is Charlie Banner, head of our Norelec Division,” Haggerty went on. “Best brain in the world—so long as he lays off the booze. When he gets loaded he has trouble pouring rainwater out of a rubber boot with the directions printed on the heel but so long as I ride herd on him he does a pretty good job, eh, Charlie?” He brayed a particularly nasty laugh. “I’m letting him off the leash a little today as you can tell, but tomorrow it’s back on Pepsi for old Charlie.”

Banner’s square, heavy face was dull red beneath the tan as he tried to keep his smile. He didn’t offer his hand, just nodded before he raised the old-fashioned glass to his wide mouth.

“The others,” Victor Haggerty was saying bluntly, “are nobody you’d want to meet. Just people I pay big money to in salaries and get damned little work out of.” The bray

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sounded again and the men so humiliated smiled fondly at the bastard who had put it to them so crudely.

That was Victor Haggerty for you. He starved for acceptance, perhaps even love, and so he went to great trouble and expense to arrange affairs that would bring people clustering about him. Yet when he had them all gathered around, he had to insult them, sneer at them, publicly humiliate them. It was a compulsion; he must have had sense enough to know that by doing this he made himself despised by the people he wanted to cultivate, hated by the underlings and hirelings he mistreated.

Haggerty was a big, flabby man who looked older than his age, which was about forty that Sunday afternoon when I dropped out to *Versez Souci*. He'd been a powerful specimen at one time but that was before he went on his hypochondriac kick and stuffed himself with pills and potions, cut down exercising to the vanishing point because of his "bum ticker" and otherwise let his oversized body go to pot. He had a big, round head with thinning sandy hair, eyes that either squinted suspiciously or bulged in anger, a wide shark's mouth and—against all the rules—a firm, square chin, an All American Boy's chin.

He was one of the twenty-five wealthiest men in the United States and although I detested him I had to admit he probably would have made it that big even if his father hadn't left him a great deal of money. As I'd told the Inspector, my father and Victor's old man, Pat Haggerty, had been pretty close at one time, both interested in the same financial markets, both making more money than either of them could have dreamed possible when they were boys together in South Boston, the sons of Irish immigrants. They had been partners for a time at the start and although they couldn't stick together long (whoever heard of two such explosive Irishmen staying partners long?) their business

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careers paralleled each other's after that. Pat Haggerty went further in the accumulation-of-riches department than my father, F. X. Burke having been a man who enjoyed life to the fullest and Pat having become infatuated with money for its own sake.

The careers of their sons were totally different. Victor Haggerty took over where Pat left off and improved on the old man's financial shrewdness, daring and ruthlessness. Amos Burke tried but he never got Thrill One out of making two dollars bloom where only one had bloomed before. Once Victor Haggerty took over his father's incredible financial and industrial empire, he shot up far out of my ken. I never had been fond of him, he had never liked me, and until he married Liz we saw each other only accidentally and at satisfactorily separated intervals.

When he married Liz, though, Victor made an effort to get chummy and because I'd always liked Liz I accepted his invitations and reciprocated in kind. I knew Liz must be terribly lonely, married to a man who seemed to get some strange satisfaction out of alienating all her old friends, so I gritted my teeth and went sailing on Victor's yawl, played golf with him and otherwise tried to find something likable in his makeup so I could keep on being Liz's friend. No use. There wasn't anything likable and I finally gave up trying. That had been over a year ago and now, when he sneered across the table, I saw that he hadn't changed a bit, at least not for the better.

More to keep from looking at the people he'd just accused of cheating him out of the wages he paid them than anything else, I built a weak Scotch and soda and started to figure out a way I could get Haggerty separated from his sycophants so I could find out what this death threat was all about.

"Y'know, Mac," I heard Haggerty tell the handsome doc, "I just might tell you to take your no-diving nonsense and

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stick it. I want to show Amos, here, how Charlie's little whatchamacallit works."

Dr. MacLean didn't lose his brilliant smile as he looked at his patient over the rim of his glass. When he lowered it, he said: "Let somebody else show it off, Victor. That thing looks too dangerous to me and I don't want to lose my favorite patient."

Charlie Banner was further off the leash than I'd suspected at first glance. He swung his heavy, flushed face toward the doctor and growled: "You sayin' I'd let Mr. Haggerty try anything that was dangerous? You think I wouldn't check it out myself before I'd let him get on it?"

Victor gave another of his nasty laughs. "Maybe Mac thinks you're figuring on killing me with that gadget so you could take over Norelec, Charlie, and drink it right into the ground," he cried. "Well, in case that was your idea, let me warn you that if anything happens to me that's in the least suspicious, any accident that some of your bright boys at Norelec might dream up, you're going to find yourself in more trouble than you ever thought could happen all at once."

For a second, I thought Charlie Banner was going to go for the fat-faced tyrant who was laughing at him. The engineer's face turned an unhealthy shade of grey, with white at the corners of his mouth where the muscles bunched, and I gathered myself to interfere if he made a lunge; not that I didn't sympathize with the guy but I'd been sent out to *Versez Souci* to keep Victor Haggerty from getting hurt, after all, and I supposed that any attacks on him, justified or not, came under my jurisdiction.

I don't know what Banner might have done if Jean Samson, the Snow Maiden, hadn't spoken in her cool, utterly imperturbable voice. "There's no need for you to demonstrate the Trampoboard, it seems, Mr. Haggerty," she said.

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"It looks as though Mr. Sparrow is going to perform for his circle of avid admirers."

I followed her cold, ice-green eyes toward the pool and saw Beau Sparrow, the young painter who had elicited *yum-yum* sounds from Angela Wyckoff, bouncing up and down on a strange contraption that was placed beside the pool's regulation diving board. The thing looked to be a metal box hardly eighteen inches high but as I watched I saw that it had some kind of covering which provided the action of the whippiest springboard. Sparrow was testing its spring and apparently finding it enjoyable; he bounced higher and higher, grinning at what must have been an extraordinary sensation, being propelled into the air by a gadget that looked about as resilient as a soap box.

Countess Orazzi was egging him on. "Get eet for me, Beau," I heard her command as the other poolside noises died and everybody watched Sparrow. "Get me my ring like the dear little native boys at Acapulco."

Sparrow went up and down, then up in a leap that must have carried him at least six feet in the air.

"Please, Beau," L'Orazzi cried. "Be my little native boy."

Maybe Sparrow started to dive then or maybe he intended to just keep on bobbing up and down on the Trampo-board for the admiration and edification of the onlookers. I don't know. Nobody ever found out. Because when he came down on the gadget the next time there was a gunshot report and the young artist was catapulted outward at an angle. I thought for a second he was going to sail clear across the pool but his parabola broke at its height and he sliced down into the water with a crashing splash. The impact broke his fall some, but not enough. Even from where I stood I could see his head bang into the side of the pool, under water, and Sparrow's body doubled, then sank to the bottom, all awkward angles.

Everybody stood stock still for what seemed a long time,

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holding their breath. Then I headed for the pool at a run. As I broke away from the group at Haggerty's table I heard Victor say harshly:

“Beau Sparrow! That's a hot one! They killed the wrong man!”

TWO

1.

I managed to scuff off my loafers and wrestle out of my jacket before I got to the edge of the pool and went in. My dive carried me to Beau Sparrow, huddled on the bottom; after his first disjointed sprawl he had curled into the foetal position and there he lay in macabre security, hunched over himself, his eyes half open and staring intently at his own middle.

I got an arm under him and pushed him to the surface, kicking myself up off the floor of the pool. When we broke water, I managed to hold him with a grip under one shoulder and paddle to the edge of the pool where half-a-dozen pairs of hands reached down to lift him up over the side.

"Ho," I heard the Countess chortle. "He is fooling you. Beau is soch a teaser."

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And then, with a thin thread of terror in her voice, she asked: "Beau? You are not hurt, Beau?"

I raised myself up out of the water to find Ian MacLean working over Sparrow; Victor Haggerty, Jean Samson, Charlie Banner and the others crowded around. Over the shoulder of some girl I didn't know peered the enormous round eyes of Angela Wyckoff. In the hush of apprehension came the driving beat of Ravel's "Bolero," thundered out into the hot, still Sunday afternoon air by Liz Haggerty's stereo.

"He's breathing, but just barely," I heard Dr. MacLean say. "He must have hit his head. Concussion."

Or fracture, I told myself. He hit the side of the pool one hell of a crack.

Somebody was twitching at my soaked shirtsleeve and I turned to look down into the black eyes of the Countess Orazzi. If there had been terror in her voice a moment before it hadn't lasted long, at least not in her lovely, faintly predatory face. Now she seemed more annoyed over Beau's accident than worried about its outcome but I said soothingly, "I think he'll be all right. Luckily, the doctor's right here and—"

She interrupted me. "When you were down there, did you see my ring?" she asked.

I must have blinked and let my jaw drop. "Ring?" I asked.

"Yes, my beautiful diamond that—that my husband, the Count, gave me at San Remo when—" She saw she wasn't getting through to me so she made an impatient gesture with one silver-nailed hand. "It was the reason he was diving, don't you see? It was a—a game. He threw my ring in the pool as a joke and then he said he'd dive for it like the dear little boys at Acapulco. It is a very valuable diamond. Go back in the water and find my ring, please?"

There were several things I could have said to the Count-

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ess Orazzi at that moment, none of them polite. Instead of telling her the first six things that came to my mind, I just smiled and said: "If it's all that expensive I'm pretty sure it won't dissolve, Countess." Then I turned my back on her to watch the people working over Beau Sparrow.

She said something under her breath. It was in Italian and my Italian idiom is pretty shaky but I'm fairly sure that whatever she said to my back wasn't complimentary.

"He needs oxygen," Victor Haggerty was trumpeting in his harsh, take-charge voice. "Get him into the pool house. I keep a portable oxygen tank there just in case I have an attack at the pool."

I told myself that, for once, Haggerty's hypochondria was going to do somebody some good. I never claimed to be a doctor but even I could see that Beau Sparrow was having trouble breathing. Artificial respiration or oxygen seemed absolutely imperative to get this boy over the shock hump.

"You're all wet anyway, Amos, so you can carry him into the pool house," Haggerty told me.

I waited for MacLean to give the word that it was all right to lift Sparrow instead of bringing the oxygen out there to the pool, but Victor was in command. When I hesitated he snapped a word to Banner and the thickset, shocked sober Norelec boss hoisted Beau in an ungentle fireman's lift and headed for the ornate pool house behind the table where he and Haggerty had so recently staged their near-scene. I saw MacLean frown, then hunch his shoulders in a shrug: obviously the good doctor would rather lose this emergency case than antagonize a nice, fat patient such as Victor Haggerty.

Victor was hurrying along beside Banner carrying Sparrow. Next came that impassionate Valkyrie, Jean Samson, with Dr. MacLean trailing her. I squished along after them and got inside the pool house before somebody closed the

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door on the crowd that was all for jamming inside to see the action.

While Banner was carrying Sparrow to the couch, with Haggerty directing him, I had time to look around the pool house. It was quite a place, with a completely equipped bar, marquetryed Louis Quatorze gaming tables, chintz-covered easy chairs, fixtured sunlamps, everything a nonswimmer could need to make himself comfortable.

Victor went to a closet door, wrenched it open and hauled out a small, green, portable oxygen tank. He trundled it across the room to the couch, attached a face mask to the hose and started to clamp it down over Sparrow's nose and mouth. MacLean slapped away the mask with an almost savage gesture.

"Just a minute, Victor," he rapped out. "I'll handle this in my own inexpert way, if you don't mind. If you want to do something useful, run up to my car and get my medical case."

Haggerty's look of astounded outrage would have been comical under any other circumstances. "Me, *run?*" he bleated. "You're telling me to run an errand for you, with my heart? You know I couldn't run ten feet without—"

"Best thing in the world for you, exercise," the doctor interrupted calmly. "If you wouldn't fire me at the suggestion, I'd prescribe a half-mile jog every morning before breakfast."

Haggerty bared his teeth in a wolfish grin. "Yeah, I bet you would if you dared, at that. When they found me dead you could say, dear me, I guess I prescribed the wrong thing, and then you could—"

"I hate to break up this little chat," I said, "but we've got a pretty sick boy here, haven't we?"

That brought MacLean back to his duty and even made Haggerty go to the pool house door to send somebody to

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MacLean's car for the medical case. The doctor turned Sparrow over on his stomach, his head turned to one side. Then MacLean tested the tank valves (it seemed as though it took him forever) and looked around the room. "Nobody's smoking, are they?" he asked. When we all said no, he placed the mask over Beau's face and turned the hose valve.

He crouched over Sparrow, one hand on the artist's wrist to count his pulse, using his other to raise Beau's eyelid from time to time. After ten or fifteen seconds he frowned in a way that told us that the oxygen wasn't bringing Beau around as fast as it should. There was a rap on the door and somebody handed in the medical case, which Banner brought over to the couch.

"This man's beginning to cyanose," MacLean said with professional unemotionalism. He took away the mask and asked, "Mr. Burke, do you know artificial respiration?"

"Mouth-to-mouth?" I asked.

"No, the old-fashioned pressure way," MacLean said, and moved aside to let me lean over Sparrow and begin the one-and-two-and-three snap-back pumping that every Boy Scout had to learn before mouth-to-mouth resuscitation became so fashionable. The doctor filled a hypodermic from a phial in his bag and touched my shoulder.

"We'll turn him over on his back now," he told me. When I did, MacLean poised the needle over Beau's chest. "Adrenalin directly into the heart," he murmured to nobody in particular. "Then we'll see."

I watched the needle go in and the plunger go down, fascinated in spite of my abhorrence of any and all needles. We all stood around the couch, staring down at the handsome young man who had had it made so few short minutes before. Even on the raw edge of death, Beau Sparrow was still a handsome, well-sculptured youngster. There was an ugly bruise on the side of his forehead but there was no

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bleeding, no convulsions to mar the classic perfection of his face. I suppose I should have been thinking more solemn thoughts but actually I was telling myself that it was understandable that Sparrow could make a good living out of his art, all critics notwithstanding: give a boy with his looks a modicum of talent and, as Angela had said, there would be plenty of fading beauties who would pay big money to buy his company while he flattered them in paint.

It was on such an ungenerous note that Ian MacLean shook his head decisively, almost despairingly, and straightened from his crouch.

"He's dead," he announced quietly. "He must have had a massive brain hemorrhage."

I looked at Victor Haggerty. The pulpy man with the balding head seemed to be hit hard by MacLean's announcement. His face was greenish-white, making his close-shaven beard stand out, and his hand came up to his sagging mouth in a vague gesture. He mumbled something indistinct; whatever he said made Jean Samson bring her head around sharply. For a moment, Jean's face looked humanly disturbed and then the icy, impassive curtain came down again as she turned back to look down at all that remained of Beau Sparrow.

Charlie Banner, whose Norelec engineers had "thrown together" the Trampoboard, the man who had brought the machine to *Versez Souci* for Victor Haggerty to demonstrate, was sober now, more shaken than Victor. Banner kept his eyes pinned on the body on the couch, no matter how much he might have wanted to tear them away, look at something else, anything except the corpse that could very well have been Victor Haggerty who ruled his life so mercilessly.

"Jesus," he muttered finally. "Everybody'll say I—"

"It was an accident," Dr. MacLean interrupted smoothly. "A tragic accident."

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He went to his medical case and began rearranging the things he'd messed up while getting the adrenalin hypo ready. I headed for the telephone at the far end of the bar. When I passed the window I heard faint music: Liz was still attending her stereo concert.

This time, the record was the Mozart-Süsmayer requiem, "Lacrymosa."

2.

Henry answered the phone and told me that Tilson was there at the apartment, waiting for me. I told Henry to bring some dry clothes out to the Haggerty place and then asked him to put Tim on the line.

"Hello, Captain," my youngest little helper began, "we got a line on your girl, Vicki Vanoy, this morning and I thought I'd drop over and show you what we found out."

"Fine," I told him. "You'd better come on out here with Henry."

"Something doing, Captain?"

"Man just got killed," I explained. "Man by the name of Beau Sparrow. Know anything about him?"

"Sparrow? Like in I, said the Sparrow, with my bow and arrow?"

"Uh-huh," I said, "only this time it's Sparrow who's dead, not Cock Robin."

"You mean it's murder?" he asked.

"Well, what's your theory?"

"My theory? Why, you just told me about it so how could I—oh, I get it. I guess we look before we name it anything. Burke's Law."

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"Go to the head of the class," I said. "You can either drive your car out here or ride with Henry, whichever you prefer."

"Captain Burke!" Reproachfully. "How many bright young detectives can ride to work in a Rolls Royce?"

So perhaps this is as good a time as any to explain how a captain of Homicide named Amos Burke can ride around in a Rolls driven by a chauffeur-houseman named Henry and maintain an establishment not usually associated with cops who are not on the take.

I've mentioned my father, Francis Xavier Burke, God rest his soul, the Irish immigrant's son who had a talent for making money. Honestly, too, or as honestly as the big-time construction business would permit in his early days. He was a big man, six-two and two-hundred-and-ten when he died, and he worked as hard as he played, which was considerable. My mother passed on before he made his big strike and so my upbringing was left to F. X. who alternately spoiled me rotten and beat hell out of me when I stepped half an inch out of line; I never knew which was coming, a kiss or a kick.

I, know that child psychologists will tell you that a child so reared is an odds-on bet to develop an insecurity that will make him a beatnik, a bedwetter or a mean delinquent but I seemed to thrive on it. When I got big enough to carry a lunch bucket, the Old Man put me to work as a laborer summers and my time card had better not show any lates or early quits unless I was ready to go two or three fast rounds with a tough old buzzard with a fast and heavy hand.

It was while I was working summers that I first developed my fatal fascination with the cops. I was right in the middle of a payroll holdup on a skyscraper job and because I

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happened to be the only eyewitness able (or willing) to identify the hoods who pulled the job, the plainclothesmen on the case carried me around with them to different joints where they hoped the heisters might show, to spend some of their money.

One of these detectives was George McLeod, a big, bluff man with a dishpan face, a tiger's heart and more patience than had been given any mortal since Job. His patience was big enough to put up with a fifteen-year-old kid with a million questions, me, and to make him take time out to explain the rudiments of crime detection in words and theories that I could understand. These little informal lessons included visits to the file department at headquarters, innumerable line-ups and a couple of interrogations when certain tough guys told George everything he wanted to know without said tough guys realizing that they'd spilled a thing.

By the time George McLeod and the other investigators ran down the gang that pulled the payroll job (patience, patience, the endless routine of checking tiny fact against tiny lie until the big truth emerged) I was hooked. Some people are born with the compulsion to play the violin or use a paintbrush or write a book; my driving impulse was to be a plainclothes cop like George and I could no more explain it than could the great musician whose forebears never included even a piano tuner.

It wasn't the glamor attached to the chase, the triumph of the arrest, that bedazzled the kid, Amos Burke. I went head over heels for the whole bit, right down to the longest, dreariest road to disappointment. The uniform, the badge, the gun, meant almost nothing; it was the fascination of the eternally grim game of crime against society that entranced young Amos.

When I told my father that I'd rather be a plainclothesman

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than a builder and financier, he didn't blow his stack as I'd expected. I happened to mention my ambition on one of his anything-for-the-precious-only-son days and he said something about my planning my own life; I could choose any career I wanted, with no interference from him, as long as it was respectable. It wasn't until my vacation between freshman and sophomore year at Amherst that he found out I really meant it: I wanted to make law enforcement my life work.

Great was his wrath and, believe me, F. X. Burke could demonstrate his emotions in violent words and actions when he got going. After I'd stopped dodging the things he threw around his office in his anger, when he started to come at me as in the old days and then stopped, realizing for the first time that I'd become quite large in the shoulders and tall in the spine, my father sat me down and talked to me as reasonably as a bugged-out Irish father could be expected to talk to a son who suddenly had gone off his rocker.

He explained to me that whereas he bowed to no man in his admiration for the police of the city, the nation and the world, it just wasn't possible for me to be one of them. Everything he owned he had acquired solely with the idea that some day I would step in and take over, let him enjoy his declining years secure in the knowledge that the Burke holdings were in the capable hands of his only son, the lad on whom he had placed so much hope and trust. He spoke of my dear mother in heaven and how unhappy she would be if she knew that her darling son was throwing away all his father had prepared for him, just to play cops and robbers.

"I'll get you a deputy sheriff's badge so you can wear a shield on your bumper," he promised me. "I know the police commissioner well and I might even get you named an auxiliary so you could play detective when you weren't busy doing your regular work, with the Burke companies. The

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fire commissioner is another good friend of mine—how would you like a red blinker and a siren so you could—”

“For God’s sake, Dad,” I broke in. “I don’t want to be a Junior G-Man. I want to be a police officer.”

“Well, go out and try to be one, thin!” he bawled in the brogue he took on when he was furious. “See how long ye’ll last in the police academy, you who wouldn’t walk accrosst the shtreet if ye could drive there in one of y’r foine cars, Amos Burke a policeman—hah! About two hours of walkin’ a beat in the rain would cure ye of all y’r foine ideas, it would, it would.”

“Let me try,” I said. “If I flunk out of the police academy, I’ll never say another word about it. But I’ve got to try, at least.”

The donnybrook ended with my promise to finish school and this I did and was glad I did, later. Amherst had very few majors beneficial to a would-be plainclothes officer but football, swimming and lacrosse kept me in shape and campus life made me a little less the conceited oddball I’d been when I entered Amherst. And I read a lot of technical books on law enforcement and crime detection, books that would have been duller than Gibbons’ *Decline and Fall* to the average joe but which were more exciting than a John Dickson Carr to Amos Burke, undergraduate.

When I graduated in ’forty-eight I headed for the police academy over my father’s urgings to take a long vacation, see Europe, enjoy myself; I deserved it, for school had been a grueling grind. I looked all worn out. I brushed off F. X.’s allurements but I couldn’t brush off Uncle Sugar when the Korean police action started. I wound up in the M.P.’s and while my military police service was mostly confined to getting AWOL’s back to their outfits and mothering homesick drunks, at least it was police work of a sort. When I was discharged I went back to the police academy and there I found out what hard work and grinding study really was.

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George McLeod got me into the academy. My father probably could have said a word in the right place and I not only would have been admitted but also automatically passed with honors but he was against the whole schmeer, naturally. He wouldn't have lifted a finger to ease one aggravation and that was the way I wanted it.

"So be a cop," he growled when I went off to the academy. "There are too many Burkes in the world for anybody to connect you with me offhand and if you try to use my name to make things easier for you I'll swear you're another Burke, an Ulsterman, so help me."

I never used my father's name, although I'll admit I was tempted more than once. I was just another would-be cop fighting to keep from being dropped from the academy and in spite of all the reading and physical toughening-up I'd done in school there were half a dozen men at the academy who were better than I was at most things and who had the added advantage of knowing that this was the biggest opportunity to be somebody they were ever likely to get; they weren't handicapped by the thought, subconscious or otherwise, that if they failed they had a twenty or thirty-million-dollar cushion waiting for them to fall on.

Well, I finally made graduation, though not at the top of my class, and then—but this is the story of who killed Beau Sparrow, not *The Life and Times of Amos Burke*. Suffice it to say that I worked hard, kept my nose clean, got more than my share of breaks and eventually made captain of Homicide. If there was anybody prouder of my appointment than George McLeod, whom I now ranked, it was my Old Man: to have heard him tell it, I was the greatest thing that had come along since they invented policemen.

Since I'd made captain I'd gathered together a hard-working Homicide Squad with George McLeod as my righthand man and a veteran sergeant, Les Hall, and a youngster, Tim

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Tilson, as the men who usually worked closest to me. All the others were good cops; our record of closed cases was the highest in the state, a fact that effectively answered complaints from certain quarters about the unorthodox way a particular millionaire Homicide captain operated.

When my father died, it looked for a while as though I'd have to give up police work and try to fill F. X.'s shoes but the Old Man had arranged it otherwise. Once he was convinced that I was doing a good job in the work I loved, F. X. had looked ahead and had begun delegating more and more executive authority and responsibility to the men who had grown up in the businesses he controlled. Consequently, the "Burke Empire," as disappointed competitors called it on occasion, kept running smoothly with a minimum need for me to do more than sign a few papers every once in a while—and get richer and richer despite myself.

While I was waiting for Henry to bring me out some dry clothes, I went out to the side of the pool and examined the Trampoboard that had tossed Beau Sparrow out of this world. It told me nothing. It was an oblong lightweight aluminum alloy box with a heavy, pliant mesh covering a tangle of mechanical gadgets apparently operating on a pneumatic principle. Whatever had gone wrong with the thing lay under that mesh and, after a look at the locknuts securing the thing, I decided to wait for somebody to check it out who was less baffled by any and all machinery than I was.

When I straightened from my once-over-lightly examination of the Trampoboard I found Angela Wyckoff standing beside me, her eyes still round and wondering. "Amos," she asked me in a half-whisper, "what happened? What really happened, I mean?"

I shrugged. "It looks as though this thing blew a gasket. Either that, or Sparrow lost all sense of direction when he made his dive."

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"But he was a beautiful diver," the redhead said. "I've seen him off the high board at the Country Club pool. And I was watching him, Amos. I was real close and it looked as though that—that gizmo sort of *shot* him off the platform. He wasn't ready to dive: I could tell that by his expression when he felt himself going."

"If you were that close I ought to ask *you* what really happened," I said. "Did anybody else go off the Trampoboard?"

"The what? Oh, is that what they call that awful thing?" She looked at the metal box with its mesh platform as though it were alive and ready to spring. Then she turned back to me. "No-o," she said thoughtfully. "At least I didn't see anybody use it. As a matter of fact, it wasn't there until just a few minutes before Beau got on it. Or I don't *think* it was. Of course, it could have been there and nobody noticed it but right out in the open like that, you'd think somebody would have tried it just for kicks, wouldn't you?"

"Unless they didn't know what it was," I said.

At the same time I told myself it stood to reason that if the Trampoboard had been there very long, one of the muscle boys would have at least stepped up on it and found out that it had a give like a springboard; if one of them had, it was a cinch he would have had to show off on it, so it figured that the Mister America also-rans hadn't seen it. Victor Haggerty had said he intended to demonstrate the gadget, until Dr. Ian MacLean vetoed the idea—and thereby saved him from at least a nasty spill if not a cracked skull. Chances were that Charlie Banner had brought the machine out to *Versez Souci* on his boss's orders, had planted the Trampoboard beside the pool and then had learned that Haggerty had been forbidden to dive. Before Banner could collect his dangerous toy—he had had to stop for a few quick drinks, that being his day off the leash—Beau Spar-

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row had mounted the Trampoboard to dive for Countess Orazzi's ring and . . .

What about that ring? I looked around and damned if there wasn't the Countess, on her knees beside the pool, leaning over the water so that the sagging neckline of her dress gave the lie to all possible canards about her wearing falsies, while she directed a Haggerty flunky who was wielding a pool skimmer. The gardener was having a tough time trying to get the long-handled net to the proper spot with one eye fastened on the beauties thus revealed.

"Nononono, to the left!" I heard L'Orazzi cry. "There—a leetle more. Nononono—*sie cieco, sciocco?*"

No, the fool wasn't blind but he was liable to be if she leaned over much further; remember what happened to the villager who peeped at Lady Godiva?

"Look at her," Angela growled disgustedly.

"I am," I said. "A prettier set of—"

"I don't mean that," the redhead said indignantly. "I mean just look at her, worried about her damn ring when her boyfriend's lying dead—and all because she made him dive after it."

I had to admit that Angela had something there. Most tempestuous Italian countesses would hardly be recovering a bauble, no matter how priceless, from a swimming pool a few minutes after their *bello ragazzo* had done himself in, obeying their command. If one wanted to be generous, one could say that the Countess was still in shock even though she didn't look or sound like it. Or perhaps she was utterly objective: she might have reasoned that there was nothing she could do to bring Beau Sparrow back to life but she could recover a ring worth X number of dollars and this she meant to do before she let her sorrow take over.

"I'd like to tell her what I think of her," Angela was muttering fiercely.

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"Stay here and think up some good ones," I advised her. "I want to talk to her."

"Grill her good," was Angela's parting shot as I walked down the pool toward the Countess and the walleyed gardener. The flunky must have seen me coming and put his mind on his work because just as I reached them he brought up the pool skimmer with the ring caught in its fine mesh.

L'Orazzi scrambled to her feet with a fine display of long legs and snatched the ring out of the skimmer, slipped it over her finger. "Oh, thank you, thank you, darling!" she caroled. She looked up and saw me and I had a good view of her dark eyes losing the glow of genuine relief and taking on a certain wariness.

"Ah, it is the brave one who tried to save my Beau," she said. She flipped the ring hand at the man with the pool skimmer. "This kind man has found my ring for me and I have nothing to reward heem with so would you be so kind as to . . ." She left it hanging with never a doubt in her manner that I would pick it up.

"If he doesn't mind soggy money," I grinned, got out my wallet and slipped the breast-fancier a bill. He went off and the Countess looked after him, then turned those remarkable eyes up to meet mine. "I did not tell you before but you were very brave," she said softly, her voice caressing, even if her eyes were not. "May a desolated woman thank you for what you tried to do?"

"Well, at least the ring was saved," I said heavily.

She looked down at her hand, wiggled the finger so that the light came off the big stone in a million blue-white shards. "Darling, it's worth a fortune," she said, as though that explained everything.

"And your fiancé?" I asked.

She studied me for a moment and then made a *moue*. "I know what you are theenking," she said after a long pause.

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"I am heartless, cruel, interested only in getting my diamond back, eh? But what would you 'ave me do, scream and throw myself down beside my Beau, tear my hair? He is dead and I cannot bring him back to life, my frien', and meanwhile there's a ring worth a fortune lying at the bottom of the swimming pool where one of these *ozioranos*, these what-you-call beach boys, can pick it up during the excitement."

"The ring Beau Sparrow was about to dive for," I said. "Exactly how did a ring worth a fortune happen to get in the pool in the first place, Countess?"

"It slipped from my finger." She moved the big diamond up and down. "You see it is very loose."

"But you were sitting some distance from the pool," I pointed out. "I watched you sit down—very charming—and when you called to Sparrow, telling him to get your ring, you were still in the same beach chair."

There was a glimmer in the black eyes but L'Orazzi wasn't in the least embarrassed by her slip-up. I watched her while she discarded at least two other explanations before she said:

"You are a young man with many questions, eh? But I will tell you what happened. All right, I didn't drop my ring—Beau threw it in the pool."

"Oh?"

"He was a child, that one, in many ways. He never liked me to wear the ring because my hosband, the Count, gave it to me and it is soch a beeg diamond that he could not match it weeth one of his own. So today he told me to take it off, it, what-you-say, annoyed him. I said don't be seelly; I laughed at heem. So he snatched off the ring and threw it in the pool, like the spoiled bambino he is—was."

She was silent for a moment and then saw I was waiting. She shrugged expressively, moved her hands.

"Of course I could not let heem, what-you-say, get away

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with this display. I told him to dive for it, as the paid divers at Acapulco dive from the rocks for silver dollars.”

She said all this quite calmly, with no voice tremors and certainly no tears.

“And of course you must be heartbroken over the fact that he was killed because you told him to dive,” I said.

A corner of her mouth curled. “If you mean that as an insult, *giovanetto*, you ’ave missed. Yes, I am heartbroken, if you must know. I am also one who does not weep easily in front of other people so they may laugh in their secret hearts and say she deserves it. Let us say I wept all my tears away a long time ago, when I was much younger.”

I bowed, as courtly as I could be in my saturated suit. “Let us say so, indeed, *Contessa*,” I said. “And as you pointed out, tears couldn’t bring Beau Sparrow back, could they?”

I looked through a break in the trees and saw the Rolls wheeling up the drive, Henry at the wheel and Tim in the rear seat, lord of all he surveyed.

“One thing,” I said, “if I were you I’d have that ring tightened. I don’t understand why you haven’t before this. *Arrivederla, Contessa*.”

“*Ciao*,” she said carelessly and went back to her study of the big diamond on her finger.

3.

Henry had a change of clothing and dry shoes in the Valpack and Tim Tilson had a flock of questions. I was anxious to shed my wet things before anything else, so I shut off Tim’s opening babble.

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"Later," I said. "Right now I want you to go over that Rube Goldberg diving board, that box up at the end of the pool, while I change. That's the gadget that caused the accident, if that's what it was."

"You think it was something else, Captain?" young Tilson asked. "Like murder?"

"In a murky situation, coincidental accidents must be suspect," I said pontifically. "Burke's Law. Get to work, my young friend. Henry, let's see where I can change into some other pants."

Henry has been with me for a long time, long enough for him to take almost everything in his stride. Having to drive out to a multimillionaire's estate of a Sunday afternoon with a dry outfit for the boss because he went swimming with his clothes on was nothing for Henry; he'd been called on to do far odder things than that and had performed them without a blink.

I've always cast a jaundiced eye on the claim that a certain servant "worshipped" his or her employer. From my experience, a servant who tolerates his employer's foibles is a rare jewel indeed and to find one who enjoys the boss's idiosyncrasies is something comparable to Copernicus' discovery of the heliocentric theory. Henry was such a find. His Oriental mind (he was a Filipino with Chinese blood somewhere in his background) was possessed of an enormous calm combined with a sense of humor that never let him be bugged by any of the vagaries demanded by my job. He was not even mildly infuriated by such things as spending all day preparing me an extra special dish only to have something break which forced me to grab a hamburger downtown. One of his finest facets was the forbearance he showed in letting me mess around his kitchen. He was a chef that any fine dining room would have been happy to hire for big money and still he let me, a mere dilettante, take over his domain on occasion.

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Now he trailed me with the Valpack while I headed back toward the big house. I assumed there were dressing rooms in the pool house but with the party having been so rudely terminated that place must be crawling with beach boys and pretty girls getting back into their clothes. Before I'd come out to the pool to have my little chat with the Countess, Sparrow's body had been taken to the main house with Victor, Dr. MacLean and the others going along, so I knew the people I wanted to talk to were in that conglomerate horror, *Versez Souci*.

I squished up to the terrace door overlooking the formal gardens and my ring was answered by a butler I remembered as Morgan or Martin, something like that. He spoke apologetically.

"I'm very sorry, sir," he told me, "but Mr. Haggerty has issued orders that no one shall—oh, it's Captain Burke." He looked as distressed as a man in a striped vest can look. "I hope you don't mind waiting a moment, sir, while I find Mr. Haggerty and see if he—"

"I'm sorry, but I do mind; I'm wet and I need changing," I broke in. "Just so we won't have to wait while you check with Mr. Haggerty—" I took out my wet badge folder and flipped it open—"police."

"Yes, sir," he said, relieved. "This way, please, sir."

We went inside, into a library that had shelves of good books (well, beautiful *bindings*, anyway) stretching from floor to ceiling. Victor Haggerty was sitting in a deep green leather armchair while beside him stood another butler with a silver tray bearing half-a-dozen pill bottles, a carafe of water and a couple of glasses. On his other side was Dr. Ian MacLean, holding Victor's wrist, taking his pulse. The Queen of the Fjords, Jean Samson, sat on the other side of the room with her knees crossed. She did not have the legs of a Valkyrie—or perhaps she did: I'm not up on my Norse

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sagas and perhaps the Valkyries all came up with beautiful, smooth, well-shaped underpinnings once they got down off those white horses.

Victor was stuffing down a handful of pills when I came into his sight. He grabbed up a glass of water and swallowed thirstily, eyeing me over the rim of the glass.

"Where can I change?" I asked him, indicating Henry and the Valpack.

Haggerty lowered the glass long enough to say: "In the pool house with the others. Or do cops expect special treatment?"

Before I could say anything to that, Jean Samson said quickly, smoothly: "There's a lavatory just off there. Through that little door set in the wall in the green book section."

I decided to ignore Victor's crack and started for the door Samson indicated. I'd half-noticed something peculiar about that library and now I realized what it was: I'll be damned if Haggerty hadn't had all his books arranged according to the color of the bindings, the greens in one section, the maroons in another, the linen-spined volumes in another, and so on. I bet myself that a psychiatrist could really find something significant in that twist and I thought about having a bookbinder make up a special set of genteel erotica for Victor's Christmas present if I ever felt the need to give him one: each book would be bound in different colored morocco so they'd be scattered all over the library. Then there'd be a couple with striped bindings and where would our Victor put those?

(Amos Burke, Captain of Homicide, had a possible murder on his hands and he wasted time thinking up not very funny practical jokes. Victor Haggerty affected people that way.)

I got into my dry clothes and Henry stowed the wet things in the bag. He also insisted I take a couple of antihista-

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mines he'd brought along to ward off the double pneumonia or whatever he imagined would strike down a six-three, two-twenty-eight pound horse who had taken an impromptu dip in a pool on a balmy afternoon. It was a strange thing about Henry; he fussed over me like a neurotic mother hen about such things and yet when I've been creased by a slug, as has happened a couple of times in the pursuit of my duties, he always shrugged it off as nothing important.

"No bullet with your name on it," he explained the one time I obliquely asked him about his lack of concern. "Sneaky little bugs different."

The sneaky little bugs having been taken care of, I told Henry to check with Tim, after stowing the bag in the car; perhaps he could use some of the mechanical wizardry he bestowed on the Rolls (all this and fine cooking, too!) to help Tilson probe the innards of that Trampoboard. He took off and I went back to the library to see if my charming host, Victor Haggerty, had finished his pills and was available to answer some questions.

He was, although MacLean now had a systolic pressure instrument wrapped around his arm and was watching the gauge as he pumped up the wrap-around inner tube. "Victor," he told his patient as I approached, "your pulse and your blood pressure are both more normal than mine."

"Your damned machine is busted or you're lying to me," Haggerty complained. "My heart is trying to break out of my chest. I feel awful. I think I'm going to have a bad attack before this is over."

"Nonsense," the doctor said briskly. "All imagination."

"That's what you can put on my tombstone," Victor groaned. "'He dropped dead of imagination.'" He rolled his eyes toward the ceiling. "And will somebody tell my wife what's happened and tell her to stop playing that goddamn noise box of hers?"

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I hadn't heard Liz's hi-fi since Beau Sparrow had taken his dive but perhaps that was because I'd been so busy. Now, as everybody listened, looking up toward the second floor, I could hear music but so faintly that I couldn't make out the tune. The way Victor sounded, the music could have been thunderous and I wondered if that might be because he had been listening for it—or was it reproachful?

Haggerty waited for somebody to carry out his command and when nobody jumped he bawled: "Martin! C'mere, Martin! On the double!" Which was not exactly the recommended way for a master to call a butler in a striped vest, even though it brought Martin to the library doorway in a hurry.

"You wanted me, sir?" he asked in his Arthur Treacher voice.

"No," Haggerty said heavily. "I was just yelling to hear myself yell. Of course I want you. Go up to Mrs. Haggerty's rooms and tell her to shut off that damned victrola. Out of respect for the dead, if not for my nerves. Tell her that her greasy little gigolo is dead with his curly head bashed in—that ought to shut her up."

"Victor!" The shocked voice was Jean Samson's. "What a terrible thing to say!"

Haggerty swiveled toward his secretary and I thought, oh-oh, add one more to the unemployment total. Victor's black scowl landed on Samson hard enough to make a strong man quail but the ash-blond just lifted her chin and gave him back a steady cold stare, totally unafraid. It was irresistible force and immovable object met in silent deadlock for a second and then Haggerty dropped his eyes. The best he could do was grumble: "So you fell for Sparrow, too, did you? Dirty little . . ." Then followed a string of unprintables in Haggerty's inimitable venom.

"Stop it!" Jean Samson blazed. Then, abruptly, she seemed to realize that we were all staring at her, even goggling, I

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suppose, and she might have had her first clear thought of what she was doing, all she was risking, because her voice fell. "It's only—well, I don't suppose any of us knew Mr. Sparrow well but—after all, he *is* dead and—and—"

"And he was so young?" Haggerty jeered. "Struck down in the prime of life and all that crap? And who said none of us knew him well? Just wait till my wife finds out that he's dead—you'll see how well *she* knew him, at least."

I may have wanted to shut Haggerty's dirty mouth but I reminded myself that I was there on police business and that the most revelatory man alive was the one who was venting pent-up hate in verbal abuse. Burke's Law.

Ian MacLean spoke into the silence that followed Haggerty's sneering remark about Liz's friendship for Beau Sparrow. He'd unstrapped the blood-pressure instrument by then and packed it in its case. Now he snapped the flat box shut and shoved it in a pocket of his blue blazer, straightening.

"Mrs. Haggerty shouldn't have this news broken by Martin," he said. "If you don't mind, Victor, I'll go up and tell her."

"Go right ahead," Haggerty said acidly. "I can sit here and die but you go up and hold Liz's hand and tell her that her goddamn cheap little paint-slinger has gone to his reward."

He swung his big, round head toward Charlie Banner and added: "Y'know, Charlie, by screwing things up in your usual way, you might have done me a big favor, helped me preserve the sanctity of my home without having to take a horsewhip—or a gun—to that glamor boy, myself."

Apparently Banner, having been shocked sober by Sparrow's death, had been at the bottle again to get back to where he'd been. His square, heavy face was crimson, his eyes were bloodshot and the sweat stood out on his forehead even though the air conditioning kept the room almost un-

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comfortably cool. Now he looked at his boss from under his thick brows and muttered: "That's a hell of a thing to say, Victor. Y'make it sound like I made that Trampoboard go wrong on purpose. You shouldn't talk like that, even joking—and I don't know what the hell there is to joke about, with a dead man in the next room."

"Oh, I wasn't joking, Charlie, old boy," Haggerty grinned. "I meant everything I said. You may have meant me to get my neck broken on that Trampoboard but you bolluxed it up again and Sparrow flew through the air, instead."

"Goddamn it," Banner said hoarsely. "How many times do I have to say it was an accident?"

"Sure," Haggerty jeered. "Just keep on saying that. But I'd advise you to lay off the booze, Charlie. They say Amos Burke is a demon detective and if you're stoned you'll make it easy for him to pin it on you."

Banner swung his red eyes toward me. "You think I gimmicked that board so's Victor would get killed?" he asked me. "You're gonna make me the patsy?"

I said, "Nobody's going to be made a patsy, Mr. Banner. We don't operate that way."

"Hah, don't you believe they don't," Haggerty laughed. "They have to keep their record looking good so they always come up with the fall guy, the sacrificial lamb. In this case, I wouldn't be surprised if you turned out to be the guilty man, Charlie, but even if you're not you've got to admit you make one hell of a fine suspect."

"Jesus, Victor," Banner gritted, "how can you talk like that? After all I've done for you—"

"Like what?" Haggerty barked. "I gave you a job when nobody else would touch you with a ten-foot pole because of your thirst and what happened at—"

"Shut up!" Banner yelled. He turned to me in sheer desperation. "Can't you make him shut up before I blow my top and really hurt him?" he begged me.

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"There's been too much loose talk being tossed around here, anyway." I nodded. "Suppose we all simmer down for a while. You'll have a chance to talk all you want when we start asking questions—and I promise you we'll have a lot to ask."

"Sure," Victor said. "Ask Banner why he ever thought he could get away with—"

"I tell you I didn't have anything to do with it," Banner cried. "Look at it this way—how could I afford to, even if I wanted to?"

"Hah, so you admit you wanted to kill me, huh?" Victor snarled.

"Okay, okay," I said. "Let's break it up, shall we?"

Sometimes it's fine when people start throwing accusations at each other and sometimes it deteriorates into a name-calling session with two men just repeating, you-did, I-didn't, and that's just wasting time. I said: "Victor, if you're through with Dr. MacLean, I'd like to talk with you alone. Where can we go where we won't be disturbed?"

He stared at me, amazed. "Me?" he asked finally. "You want to question me? The man they tried to kill?"

"I didn't say I wanted to question you," I hedged. "I just want to talk to you alone. How about the room across the hall?"

He shook his balding head, his face ugly. "If you've got anything to say to me you can say it right here. Who do you think you are, trying to push me around in my own home, go here, go there?" He looked at me and his eyes narrowed. "Come to think of it," he went on, "why did you come out here this afternoon? I know damned well it wasn't because you wanted to attend any party of mine and you haven't seen your dear friend, Liz, so the two of you could talk about her unfashionable husband; so how did you happen to be on the scene when this thing happened? Did you know it was coming, Burke?"

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I seldom let myself get so fed up with another man's attitude that I snap back at him out of anger but this was one of those times.

"Maybe I was sent out here to find out the reason for that letter you wrote the Commissioner," I told Haggerty.

He looked at me, his mouth half open. "Letter to the Commissioner?" he asked me. "What letter? What are you talking about?"

And looking at him, I had the strong feeling that Victor Haggerty actually didn't know what I was talking about, that he had never addressed a letter to the Commissioner asking for protection against somebody who wanted to kill him.

Oh, fine, I told myself. Just dandy.

4.

Having shot off my mouth like the rawest rookie, there was nothing for me to do but try to cover the slip as best I could. With Victor blating indignant questions, this wasn't easy. What did I mean, accusing him of writing letters he'd never heard of, why would he write the Police Commissioner when the Commissioner and everybody else in town would come running to his office if he wanted to talk to them? All he had to do was pick up the phone.

"What kind of letter?" he kept repeating. "What did it say? Who signed it? Let me see it."

I finally had to admit I didn't have the letter with me (hell, I hadn't even read the letter, myself, just stood there like a jerk while the Inspector read it to me) but my im-

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pression—oh, I must have sounded like a stupid assistant constable!—was that he, Victor, had asked the Commissioner to send somebody around to talk over something that was worrying Haggerty.

"This doesn't make sense," Victor said when I limped to a halt. "You've got the reputation of being a smart cop and you came out here on the strength of some crazy forgery you didn't even bring along with you?" He uttered a single word that expressed his opinion of my intelligence and ability in barnyard terms.

I had to agree that Victor was right; it didn't make sense. I hadn't read the letter, I hadn't claimed it for study as possible evidence, I'd just taken it for granted that Haggerty had written the letter and in so doing I'd broken Burke's Law: taking things for granted is a luxury denied all members of the Homicide Squad.

"Okay, Victor," I said finally. "So I goofed. So you didn't write any letters. Let's say I needed an excuse to come out here and drink your booze and eat your food and pinch your pretty girl guests. However it was, I was here when Sparrow was killed and I'm staying with the case until we find out what's what."

"Hell, I can tell you what's what right now," he grunted. "Banner's engineers bolluxed up the Trampoboard, deliberately or otherwise, and Sparrow was unlucky enough to get killed on it instead of me."

"Could be," I said, and started out of the library toward the hall and the stairs to the second floor. Haggerty's derisive laugh didn't make my retreat any easier to take, either.

At the moment, there was only one thing I was sure of: if the letter was a forgery, whoever wrote it made it look authentic. Both the Commissioner and the Inspector were men of more than average acumen and neither was likely to fall for a note scrawled in pencil on dime-store paper, signed by one of the wealthiest men in the world. The letter the

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Inspector had fingered while giving me this assignment to find out who was threatening "my old college buddy" had been stiff vellum, very expensive, and it stood to reason that Haggerty's name had been engraved at its top and signed at its bottom. So if Haggerty hadn't written it, how about Jean Samson, who must know his signature well? Or Liz; her husband's personal stationery must be available to her. Or, let's face it, the janitor who cleaned Victor's office could be a forger in his spare time or Martin, the butler—maybe he dunnit.

Sometime during my go-around with Victor over that damned letter, Ian MacLean had left the library to go up and break the news of Beau Sparrow's death to Liz. I knew I should have gone with him. People sometimes have their guard completely shattered by a shocking surprise and say things out of their subconscious. But the doctor had eeled out of the library so smoothly while I was boxing around with Victor that I wasn't aware he'd gone until it was too late to do much but run after him, crying: "Wait up for me!"

This certainly wasn't my day. Les Hall or George McLeod would have made sure MacLean didn't see Liz alone before they did but I admit I wasn't overanxious to risk watching Liz go all to pieces when she heard Sparrow was dead. We'd been good friends once and I had a high regard for the Liz Marsden who she was, before she married Haggerty. I'm as tough-minded as the next man but if Sparrow really had been Liz's lover I didn't want to be there to hear her wail about it in guilty grief.

At the hall doorway, Victor Haggerty got in one parting shot. "If you're going to talk to my wife," he called after me, "tell her and that smart secretary of hers not to try to smuggle that gigolo's funeral expenses into the household accounts 'cause I'll be auditing them." And he gave his sick crow's laugh.

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I was halfway up the wide, sweeping staircase when Dr. MacLean appeared at the landing. Beside him was a dark-haired girl who seemed to grow prettier the closer I got to her. She had a fresh coloring, a slender shapeliness, dark eyes and a mouth that drooped now but which obviously was capable of a quick and charming smile.

The doctor broke off whatever he had been telling this girl when I got within earshot. "I'm sorry, Captain," he told me, "but if you're coming up to question Mrs. Haggerty, I'm afraid you'll have to wait till another day. I've just given her a stiff sedative and she wouldn't be coherent, even if you could keep her awake."

I reached the landing and nodded to the dark-haired girl. The look she gave me in return would test about a-hundred-and-eighty-proof animosity. This, then, was Liz's "smart secretary" whom Victor Haggerty had just mentioned, and a fiercely protective young lady she was, too.

MacLean made the introduction in a voice that must have earned him the devotion of a thousand women patients. "I don't believe you know Mrs. Haggerty's secretary, do you, Captain? Miss Ann Maxwell, Captain Burke."

"How do you do?" I said.

She made a sound in her throat and did not offer her hand. What a shame; Miss Ann Maxwell either was a cop-hater by nature or she had been told that I was a bad man. I gave her my best smile and resolved to try to change her opinion of cops in general and Amos Burke in particular before this case was over.

I turned back to MacLean. "You're sure I can't stop in and just say hello to Liz?" I asked. "As an old friend, not in any official capacity?"

Before the doctor could answer, Ann said: "Most certainly not! Mrs. Haggerty's not well and this—this terrible accident has been an awful shock."

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"Mr. Sparrow was such a close friend?" I asked.

"No, he was painting her portrait, that's all," she said firmly, and added: "No matter what—anybody else might say."

"I wondered about that portrait," I said. "As I knew Liz, she was hardly the type who'd have her portrait painted on her own accord. Did Victor commission the portrait?"

"No," Ian MacLean said. "I suggested it, Captain."

"Oh?"

The doctor nodded and went on. "You say you're an old friend of Mrs. Haggerty so you must know that she was developing a tragic sense of inferiority—perhaps understandably so, considering her husband's—ah—domineering manner. After her breakdown, I prescribed the portrait as a therapeutic measure, something to give her self-esteem a lift."

"Breakdown?" I asked. "I hadn't heard of any breakdown."

He nodded. "About six months ago. Not too severe but she did suffer a nervous collapse. Withdrawal, incipient melancholia, even mild hallucinatory symptoms. At one time I even considered hospitalizing her but Victor wouldn't hear of his wife in what he called a nuthouse and she responded very well here at home."

"You called in a psychiatrist, of course," I said.

A faint flush touched his cheeks under the healthy tan and he shook his head. "No, I might have if Haggerty hadn't been so unreasonable about it. As it happens, I've made a study of the personality functions as a—well, you might say, side interest."

"I see," I murmured. "Brain surgery for fun and profit."

That undeserved crack brought a flaming reply from Ann Maxwell. "Mrs. Haggerty didn't need a psychiatrist," she told me. "She was just—just run down and worried and she needed a rest. Dr. MacLean's treatment got her through her bad spell faster than any head-shrinker could have."

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I remembered the gaunt, wraithlike face I'd seen at the window and told myself that if Liz was through her bad spell, the breakdown had certainly marked her up for keeps.

The news of Liz's illness could be significant. Victor Haggerty had almost certainly driven his wife to the point of collapse and people whose mental strength has been sapped by the acts of one person, not by impersonal events or a series of frustrations, have been known to come out of it with a bitter, sometimes lethal, antagonism toward the one responsible, oftentimes a resentment of which they themselves are not aware. Could gentle, gracious Liz have been left with such a hate?

By a long stretch of deduction, all this might account for Haggerty's denial that he wrote the letter to the Commissioner. He could have found out after he wrote the note that Liz was the person threatening him anonymously and, with his weird conceit refusing to let him acknowledge to the outside world that his wife hated him, he had decided to handle the problem himself.

Which deduction had several holes in it before it was fully formed. First, I didn't think Victor Haggerty was that good an actor to con me with his bewilderment when I mentioned the letter. Also, if Victor knew Liz was responsible for any anonymous threats, why had he said *they* killed the wrong man when he saw Beau Sparrow go off the Trampoboard? And where could there be any possible connection between Liz Haggerty and the diving gadget that went wrong?

"When do you think I'll be able to see Liz?" I asked into the silence that had followed Ann Maxwell's hot defense of Ian MacLean as a psychiatry hobbyist.

The doctor shrugged his handsomely tailored shoulders. "She probably won't know a thing until tomorrow morning," he said. "If I'd known you wanted to talk to her I wouldn't have given her such a strong dose."

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"I'm sure you wouldn't, Doctor," I said. "How did she take the news of Beau's death?"

"Very well. Of course I told her as gently as I could, and after I was sure her nervous state could stand it. She was shocked, of course, but not—er—disorganized by the news of the accident. As Miss Maxwell said, her only interest in Sparrow was as the artist who was painting her portrait. When you question her, I'm sure you'll see that that was the case, Captain."

"I haven't said I wanted to question her," I said. "Maybe I just wanted to say hello."

I heard Ann Maxwell smother a ladylike snort and I looked down at her. Very pretty, very neatly built, very antagonistic, this girl. "But I would like to ask you one question if I may, Miss Maxwell," I said.

She stiffened and her lovely eyes grew wary. Watch out for the nasty cop with his trick questions. *En garde contre l'ennemi dangereux*. "Yes?" she asked.

"Do you live in?" As she frowned, puzzled, I explained. "I mean do you stay here at *Versez Souci* or do you have your own place in town?"

"Why, I have my own apartment. Why?"

"Probably nothing," I admitted. "I just wondered why Mrs. Haggerty needed her secretary on a Sunday—or do you work a seven-day week?"

The puzzled frown was back. "She asked me to come out today," Ann said slowly. "I don't know why, really. I thought she had something special for me to do but all she did was play records and—" She realized she was thinking out loud and snapped her mouth shut, her eyes coming up to meet mine, defiant again.

"Is there anything wrong with her asking me to work on my day off?" she asked belligerently. "She's always been more than generous about giving me time off when I asked

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for it. I was glad to come out here this morning after church."

"I'm sure you were," I told her. "And I'm sure she appreciated your good company, helping her listen to all that fine music."

While my suspicious policeman's brain told me: *And providing her with a witness to the fact that she was in her rooms when her husband was due to go off that Trampoboard.*

5.

Back at the pool, after leaving Ann Maxwell and Dr. MacLean at the second-floor landing, I found that Tim Tilson and Henry had unfastened the necessary bolts and rolled back the metal mesh covering the Trampoboard. Laid open to my ignorant view was a mess of what looked like exceedingly powerful coil springs.

"Have you got this figured out?" I asked.

Tim nodded with that confidence of youth that I must have had once. Of course he'd figured it out—he could figure out what caused the Aurora Borealis or the workings of a woman's mind if I ordered him to.

"It's a trampoline with special springs that concentrate the reactive yield and thrust in a reduced area," he said briskly. "It looks as though one of these bolts let go completely and the ones on either side of it are loose. I think the Crime Lab should have a look."

"Uh-huh," I agreed. "You'd better call them."

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"Yes, sir," he said. "I did."

"That figures," I sighed. "That gadget was brought here by Charlie Banner who's president—"

"—of the Norelec Divison of Haggerty Industries," my maddening young assistant finished. "Charles P. Banner. He was the biggest name in astronautical engineering a while back, before the Gorgon Project went sour under his direction. There were a lot of hints about him drinking too much but Victor Haggerty took him on to head up Norelec. There was a time when everybody thought Banner was going to be the American Von Braun but according to the scoop he crawled into a bottle instead."

"What brand does he drink?" I asked.

"I don't know but I could—" He gave me a double-take and grinned. "Well, I read the aerospace trade magazines," he explained. "My second choice of a career would be astronautical engineering."

"And what you're doing is your first choice?" I asked.

He nodded. "We all have our personality quirks," he said. "What compulsion drove you to police work, Captain?"

"I'm not sure but seeing that I never had a kid brother I could slap around when he got flip, I must have secretly hoped I'd be assigned a certain rookie plainclothesman I could stomp into the ground unless he showed the proper respect from here on in."

"Yessir," Tilson said. "Very good, sir."

Henry gave one of his high-pitched giggles. He was used to this.

"Run up to the house and find Banner," I told Tim.

"Banner?"

"Yes, he can start answering some questions about this little machine and why he brought it out this morning and—what's the matter?"

Tilson's expression stopped me and made me ask the

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question. Before he spoke I knew I'd played it wrong once again that merry Sunday afternoon.

"Banner?" Tilson asked again. "Why, he just came storming out of the house and drove off." Crestfallen was the word for Timothy. "I didn't know you wanted him. I guess I should have stopped him until I was sure it was okay for him to leave, huh?"

"It's okay," I said wearily. "My fault. I seem to be doing everything wrong today."

When I examined it, it really wasn't too important: nobody as well known as Charles P. Banner seemed to be, according to Tim, was likely to do a disappearing act. And I had to remember that except for that letter to the Commissioner, since branded a forgery, and what Victor had said when Beau Sparrow took his wrong-way dive, there was absolutely nothing to indicate that this case was anything but an accident.

"Do you want Banner brought in, Captain?" Tilson asked me.

"No, I don't think so," I said. "Matter of fact, I think we might as well go back to town and enjoy what's left of our day of rest. Until we get the autopsy report on Beau Sparrow, anything we do now might turn out to be waste motion."

It wasn't until we were in the car that Tim remembered why he had dropped around to my apartment in the first place. "Oh, Captain," he said, "the three of us, Les and George and I, lucked into some fast information on Annette Venacci."

"Who?"

"Annette Venacci, Vicki Vanoy, the girl who got messed up with Victor Haggerty a long time back and swore she'd kill him when she came out of the pen."

"Oh, yes," I said. "What about her? Did she marry the

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decent young man and start raising a family in Rockford, Illinois?"

Tilson laughed. "Les underestimated her. After she was sprung she made good in a big way. The probation department wasn't too keen to talk about it, but our Vicki was scarcely through the gates before she stopped being Annette Venacci, took on a new name, stopped being a Marilyn Monroe blonde and headed for Las Vegas. Somehow she bought, found or stole somebody else's identification papers and managed to land a job in the nudie chorus line of one of the big clubs. That was all she needed. By the time the probation department picked up her trail again she'd taken up with a bigtime spender from the East and, by golly, he married her."

"Good for Vicki," I said.

"That ain't all, Captain, that ain't all. She went abroad with her husband and while over there he ate something that disagreed with him and left her a widow in Cannes." Tim paused and added: "Loaded."

"Hooray and more of it," I said. "She deserved a break after the fall she took with Victor Haggerty."

"Uh-huh, but the best part is yet to come. She was a widow a hot three months before this Italian Count came along and—"

"Stop!" I said in a strangled voice. "Stop right there! I warn you that if you try to tell me that this Count's name was Orazzi I not only won't believe you, I'll throw the book at you for insubordination, neglect of duty, conduct unbecoming a—it was Count Orazzi, wasn't it?"

"Yeah," Tilson said in an injured voice, "but how did you know? We were all congratulating ourselves about having this information dropped in our laps and you knew about it all along. Or did you?"

"I didn't," I confessed. "I just went on the old theory that once a case starts to develop crazy angles like this one has,

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it just doesn't know where to stop. Countess Orazzi is really Vicki Vanoy, huh? Well, I guess it figures."

"Burke's Law?" Tilson asked me.

"No," I groaned. "Something even more infallible—Burke's bad luck."

THREE

I.

I was in my office the next morning when George McLeod came in with the coroner's report on Beau Sparrow. The big man, who had been my friend and mentor for so many years, took the chair across the desk from me and pulled a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket, then snapped his lighter. The cigarette wobbled and the smoke spilled out of George's mouth as he talked.

"It just came in, Amos," he told me. "Sparrow had a superficial bruise in the left temporal region (I'd seen that, all right) and minor lacerations but there was no evidence of intercranial hemorrhage."

"So he didn't cave in his skull, eh?" I asked. "He must have had a thick noggin. He hit the side of that pool hard enough to dent it."

"The coroner's report said there wasn't any evidence of

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more than a mild temporary concussion, if that," George said. He reached his heavy hand across the desk to give me a light from his lighter. Quite a lighter that was, too; it had a solid gold shell and it was enscribed: *To Detective Sergeant George McLeod Who Rid the World of a Rat Named Tony Moss, 3/11/40, With Heartfelt Gratitude.* As I'd gotten the story, Moss (real name a yard long and Sicilian) *had* been a rat, a sadistic hoodlum who tortured for kicks and sold dope and women for profit. George had run him down in a dark tenement hallway and had taken a slug in the hip after Moss had "surrendered" and begged for mercy, then used a gun he had taped to his shin. McLeod was never a trigger-happy cop but he put down Moss for keeps and this lighter had come in the mail about a week after the shooting, no note, no indication of who had sent it. It wasn't until much later that George found out that the gold lighter was the gift of the late Tony Moss's girlfriend whom Tony had been on his way to kill in a peculiarly unpleasant way when McLeod had put the collar on him.

"I was happy to be the one who saved that poor girl from an awful fate," George was apt to say sententiously when telling the story. "Of course, I'd be happier if she hadn't taken up with Tony's partner and if he hadn't carved her up in little pieces when he found her cheating on him with *his* new partner."

Perhaps that's why George kept on using the lighter, to remind himself from time to time that women were a faithless lot and to stay unmarried.

When I got my cigarette going I asked, "If it wasn't the knock on the head that killed Sparrow, what was it?"

George dragged at his cigarette. "The report only says what didn't kill him, Amos. There was water in his lungs but he didn't drown. There was a lot of congestion that looked like cardiac failure but the heart itself checked out a hundred per cent. The coroner's office says there are still

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a couple of tests they have to run but from what they've found out so far, Beau Sparrow's physical condition was excellent, almost perfect."

"Except that he's dead," I said.

"Well, yeah, there's that."

"The doctor on the scene, Dr. MacLean, gave him a hypodermic shot right into the heart," I offered.

McLeod nodded. "Uh-huh. Adrenalin. It showed up in the autopsy and it's in the report. Perfectly valid procedure in last-resort cases."

It wasn't much of a theory anyway, MacLean risking a lethal injection with all those people looking on, including a man he knew to be a police captain—or did he know that at the time? "Could poison account for the symptoms, George?" I asked.

McLeod's wide mouth under the clipped moustache exploded smoke as he said: "That's the hell of it, Amos; there aren't any symptoms. That's the big problem."

"Just a dead man, huh?" I asked. "He didn't have a brain hemorrhage, he didn't drown, he didn't die of a heart attack. He's a perfect physical specimen without a single symptom. So it more or less has to be poison, doesn't it?"

George examined his cigarette thoughtfully. "I suppose it does but the coroner's boys haven't found it in the viscera yet. If it's there they'll find it, in time—you and I both know that the poison that doesn't leave a trace just doesn't exist."

"There's always a first time," I said moodily, "and to whom better could the first time happen than to me?"

"My, aren't we feeling sorry for ourself today?" George chuckled. "Behave, Amos. The toxologist is still working on it—if there's poison he'll come up with it. Give him time."

"It seems to me they've had time to find out whatever they're going to find out, if anything," I grumped. "What's the matter, are they goofing off down there today the same way I goofed off yesterday?"

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"No, they're not goofing off and you didn't goof off," McLeod said patiently. He eyed me through a haze of cigarette smoke. "Stop being sore at yourself because you were right there on the scene and couldn't do anything to prevent the accident—or whatever it was."

"It's not just that," I explained. "I have the uncomfortable feeling that somebody is sitting back getting ready to have a big laugh. On me."

It wasn't long after George McLeod left the office that Tim Tilson and Les Hall came in with more aggravation. I could tell by their expression that I wasn't going to like what they had to tell me and that meant that George P. Banner was providing a new problem. I'd sent Les and Tim to Banner's apartment as listed in the directory with the polite request that he visit me at headquarters to talk over the week end's deplorable accident.

"Well?" I asked, after Tilson closed the door of my office behind me.

"He didn't show, Captain," Tim told me. "The people at his apartment house said he left there yesterday morning and didn't come back at all last night. There were a flock of phone messages at the switchboard for him and this morning's paper was at his door but Les conned the apartment manager into opening up, just for a quick look. No Banner. No signs of him packing for a long trip, though—his bags were there and his clothes closets looked full."

"How about his office?" I asked.

"He wasn't there, either," Hall told me. "His secretary said he always came in between nine and nine-fifteen but he didn't show this morning. She called his apartment while we were there and there was no answer. I put one of the boys at the office and there's another at the apartment with orders to let us know if he checks in. You want a pickup sent out on him, Captain?"

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"I haven't got any grounds for a pickup—yet," I said. "If Sparrow's death turns out to be from natural causes, the Commissioner might take a dim view of our embarrassing respectable if thirsty astronautical engineers who happened to spend the night with some babe, talking about moon shots. Need I point out to you gentlemen that there has to be a murder before there can be a homicide suspect? So far, the medical examiner hasn't come up with a thing."

Tilson said, "A man's dead and nobody can explain why. It seems reasonable to assume murder, doesn't it?"

"The last man I knew who went barging ahead solely on his own assumption of murder is now prowling outdoor movies for a divorce detective," I said. "Like you, he was young, inexperienced, promising and overeager."

Tilson looked hurt. "I don't call trying to lay the groundwork for action, in case this is finally declared a homicide, being overeager," he said stiffly. "But I must be wrong, so maybe I'm not cut out for this work. Maybe I'd do better—"

"This fellow I was talking about was also oversensitive," I cut in.

Hall took pity on Tilson. "Aw, Tim will grow out of it, Amos," he said. "Before you know it he'll be like the rest of us, concentrating on his pension, his job security, fringe benefits and like that."

"And cautioning younger men not to solve any cases before there is a definite case," I added.

Tilson tried hard to stay hurt but it wasn't in him; his grin broke through, although it was on the sheepish side. "Well, how about me checking Sparrow's apartment?" he asked. "Just so I could feel I was doing something?"

"Okay with me," I said. "No relatives have turned up as yet but take the necessary steps to guard yourself against the cry from Aunt Minnie that the twenty thousand in cash her dear Beau promised her is missing from behind the sofa."

My interdepartmental phone rang and when I answered it

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was the Crime Lab. "Captain, we've checked the signature on the letter the Commissioner got on Haggerty's letterhead against a couple of dozen known bona fide Haggerty signatures."

"And?"

"The signature is genuine, Captain. Victor Haggerty signed that letter."

I sighed. "No chance that a clever forger—?"

"There isn't that clever a forger around, Captain, take our word for it."

I thanked the handwriting expert, hung up and relayed the news to Tilson and Hall.

"Somebody may have gotten to Haggerty after he wrote the letter and scared him stiff enough to swear he never heard of it," the sergeant offered.

"Or Beau Sparrow could have been killed as a warning," Tilson said. "When Haggerty saw Sparrow die he decided it would be wise for him to clam up."

"Uh-huh," I nodded. "There's one other explanation: a man like Haggerty must send off a flock of letters in the course of a busy day."

"You mean he could forget writing a letter like that?" Tim asked. "Oh, come off it, Captain."

"No, Timothy, he didn't mean exactly that," Les Hall said. "And from what I know of this case, you could be right, Captain. Yeah, I think maybe that's the answer."

"Okay, okay," Tilson said, scowling, "Go ahead and talk in riddles. What do you mean, exactly, Captain?"

"Suppose you try to figure it out," I suggested. "Good exercise." I got up and got my hat from the antiquated rack. "You can be pondering on that while you check Sparrow's place. I might drop by there later. I've got a call to make so you two establish a beach head at Sparrow's apartment while your intrepid captain goes on a perilous mission."

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Les Hall grinned and turned to Tim. "I told you," he said gleefully. "You owe me a buck."

Tilson looked at me reproachfully. "I thought this once you'd leave Vicki Vanoy's interrogation to the enlisted men."

"The Countess Orazzi," I corrected, "and under ordinary circumstances I would, I would. I gave it a great deal of thought, as a matter of fact. Reluctantly, I decided that this operation called for a cool and experienced head, cooler and more experienced than yours, Tim, but not quite so cool and experienced as Les's. I tell you, gentlemen, it was a difficult decision to make, which head was best qualified to handle this. My head won, but the vote was very close."

"Good luck with your head, sir," Tim said morosely. "She lives at—"

"I have the address," I broke in. "The Regency. Ten seven fifty-three Sunland Avenue. I even have the Zip Code number."

"The apartment is three-oh-seven," Tilson said doggedly. "She has a Mexican maid named Paula."

"Is the maid pretty?" I asked.

"Gee, I don't know, Captain. I just asked around and found out there was a maid, that's all."

I turned to Hall. "Les, you're supposed to be training him," I said severely. "Explain that a policeman gets the important facts first."

"I will," Les promised. "And give my regards to Princess Vicki."

"She never made princess," I said, "but I will extend your fondest regards and congratulations on her success. I know she'll be delighted to hear from an old friend."

"I bet," Les grunted.

I started for the office door and Tim Tilson called after me.

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"Hey, what if I do find twenty thousand bucks behind Sparrow's sofa?" he asked.

"In that case," I said, "Les can collect his gin rummy winnings. Not all of them but at least you can make a token payment."

2.

The maid, Paula, turned out to be a Mexican woman with a square face wearing a blank expression, two obsidian eyes that reflected nothing at all, a lipless mouth and a moustache, the perfect *duenna*.

She looked at me blankly, parted her lips a fraction of a millimeter and asked: "Please?"

I gave her a bow right out of Dumas. "I'd like to see the Contessa Orazzi," I said, putting the fillip on the *r*. Apparently the accent was enough to make Paula answer in her native tongue.

"*La Condesa no esta*," she said firmly and began to close the door of Apartment 307.

I reached for my badge case, still damp from my rescue mission after Beau Sparrow. "Think again, *tia mia*," I said gently.

Her jet eyes studied the badge, then came at me. "*Policia?*"

I nodded. "*Muy policia*, Paula," I said. "*Policia* who's coming in there in just about ten seconds whether the Countess likes it or not."

She considered this for a second without a glimmer of emotion, then said: "*Dispense usted, señor. Momenito.*"

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I *dispense*'ed. The moustached maid half-closed the door and trudged back into the apartment. I heard the distant murmur of voices, Paul's heavy tread returning, and then the maid opened the apartment door wide. She even bowed. "*Pasé usted, señor,*" she said with absolutely no cordiality in her voice.

I stepped by her and walked through a brief foyer into a living room very tastefully and expensively decorated. Opposite the entrance to the wide, sunny room was a balcony and there L'Orazzi was waiting for me at a little umbrella-shaded table where I'd apparently disturbed her having brunch.

She was still *en déshabillé* but this didn't mean she was wearing a flannel bathrobe with her hair in curlers. No indeed, the negligee she had on was exquisitely designed to pay full tribute to her figure as she rose to greet me (fully realizing the effect or otherwise why would she have risen?) and the sun shone through the diaphanous material to present her in frank and charming silhouette.

Annette Venacci had been old enough to get a permit to work in a saloon when she'd run afoul of Victor Haggerty and that meant the Countess Orazzi was in her thirties, possibly even her early forties, now, but even on close inspection a man would find this hard to believe. If she had had a face lift it had been expertly done and she had taken such good care of her body through the years that the skin of her upper breasts, arms and legs (because a knee and a stretch of thigh parted the negligee as she took a step forward) was matchlessly smooth. Her eyes were made up, but only lightly, not plastered to hide crowsfeet, and even the hand she extended to me had somehow miraculously escaped the giveaway signs so damnably indelible to the woman fighting approaching middle age.

As I came close to her I smelled a trace of delicate and

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delicious scent. The bottle that perfume came from never had sat on a store shelf: it was mixed to the wearer's specifications and L'Orazzi had known exactly the right scent to use at this time of day, not too musky for a sunlit balcony but never a college girl's new-mown hay deal, either.

Her hand was extended palm down with the wrist ever so slightly bent, so I took it and kissed the knuckles of Annette Venacci, ex-con turned titled lady. Why not? Regardless of her possible implication in the Beau Sparrow case, she had made a valiant fight of it after a rough start. Anybody who could transform herself from the little blonde second-rate showgirl who had been roughed up by Victor Haggerty into the poised and supremely confident raven-haired Countessa deserved a kiss on the hand.

"Captain Burke," she said in her sultry voice. "What a pleasure. You 'ave discovered my secret like the great detective you are—I am a shamelessly late sleeper and I am just now having my *prima colazione*, my breakfast. You must forgive my appearance, please."

"I can forgive, Countess," I told her, "but forgetting is something else again."

She gave a little chortle. "How nize-a," she smiled. "I like you, Captain Amos Burke. Come and eat with me." She spoke past me to the doughty Paula, still lingering in the background. "*Paula, café por el capitan, y unas—*"

"No, thanks," I broke in. "I had a late breakfast myself."

The maid ignored me. "*Si, Condesa,*" she said. "*Immediate-mente,*" and trudged out.

The black-haired beauty gestured toward the table. "Coffee, at least, Captain," she said. "You should try the croissants, too. They make the only possible ceevilized breakfast but they are almost impossible to find in this town."

I sat down, saying, "You're roughing it in doughnut country now."

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She giggled. "It will amuse you to know where I finally got these croissants. In an *Eenglish* bakery that specializes in scones and meat pies and such things."

She pulled a quick switch, her black eyes fastened on mine. "Tell me, please," she said, "if it's true you are so very rich, then why are you a policeman?"

I smiled back at her. "I see you've been busy finding out who I am," I told her.

She nodded seriously. "I always make it my business to find out who a handsome man is, especially when he asks me as many questions as you did yesterday. I didn't know you were of the police yesterday so if I said something wrong, forgive me."

"No," I said, as soberly, "all your answers fitted right into the picture."

Her mouth crooked. "A peecture of a selfish 'eartless woman, no? Someday maybe I can prove to you I am neither. But you have not answered my question; why are you a policeman if you are so rich?"

I'd had the same question asked me a thousand times but usually a little more obliquely. "Why are you a countess?" I asked her.

"*Semplice*," she shrugged. "I married a count."

"That's how it is with the Department and me," I said. "A love match."

The thickset Mexican maid with the blank expression came in with a tray which bore a silver coffee pot, silver sugar bowl and cream pitcher, a cup and a plate piled with croissants. L'Orazzi said, "Let us see how good a judge of character I am, Captain. I say you are no *café au lait* man. Right?"

I nodded. "Right. Just black, thanks."

"*El señor no quire nada, Paula*," the Countess told the servant and poured my coffee from the graceful pot. Paula seemed to take it as a personal affront that I didn't fill my

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cup with cream and sugar after she'd brought it all the way from the kitchen to the balcony but she bit back whatever she might have been about to tell me and retired to her domain in the back of the apartment.

The Countess settled back in her chair, beautiful, confident, but with her guard held high. "And why do you visit me thees lovely morning?" she asked. (She was clever with her accent; never one Italianized syllable too many, never so few that one could forget that English was not her native language.) "Not that I'm not overjoyed at this pleasant surprise but—oh, *naturalmente*, you come to talk about poor Beau's accident, eh?"

"Well, let's start with the accident," I said.

"A tragedy and I am guilty, Captain," she said in a low, sad voice. "Eef you are looking for one to accuse, you 'ave found her. In my anger at Beau's childishness I made him play that stupid role and so he was killed."

"What role do you mean?"

"Beau and I used to watch the boys at Acapulco dive from the high cliffs," she explained. "I found it more exciting than the bullfights. Have you seen them dive at Acapulco, Captain?"

I shook my head. Well, it was true; the three times I'd been in Acapulco the wind had been so high that the divers couldn't risk being blown off their split-second timing. I'd seen movies of the stunt, of course, but I wanted to hear this chorine-turned-countess tell about it.

"How they do eet," she was saying, "a boy poises at the top of the high cleef until jost the right moment. Below heem are bare rocks, terrible to see. Then, while the rocks are still uncovered, he dives into space. He must judge exactly when the incoming wave will cover the spot where he lands and sometimes it seems the wave will not get there in time, he will be dashed to death—ah, it is very threeling."

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"And Beau's wave never got there," I said. "Tell me, Countess, how long had you been engaged to Beau Sparrow?"

She made a gesture with a hand holding a bite of croissant. "We met a year ago in Mexico. He went there to paint and I—I was there to escape boredom. Acapulco is pleasant but I prefer Paris, of course. Paris is the most ceevilized city in Europe."

"Not Rome?"

"No more," she said with a *moue*. "All those, what-you-say, scooters and the artificial sinful gaiety, everybody trying to out-do the feelm *La Dolce Vita* and not enjoying it. No, Rome has changed. Paris is changing, too, like the Riviera and the Costa Brava. Athens and the Aegean Islands will soon be the only truly beautiful place in which to enjoy oneself."

I marveled at this woman. If I hadn't had implicit faith in my staff's record of never digging up the wrong dope on any person they'd been told to check out, I would have called it impossible for the girl who served time for trying to shake down Victor Haggerty (or who was framed by the louse when she crossed her knees too firmly) to make herself into this sophisticated woman. But I had looked over the report Tim had given me and it included all the dates and places: the Countess Orazzi really was the former Annette Venacci, Vicki Vanoy.

I picked up one of the croissants, broke it and began buttering a piece. "You've traveled a great deal, Countess," I said.

"Yes, travel is broadening but for a woman it is best not to be too broad, eh?" She looked at the plate of croissants and then down at her swelling breasts, only just confined by the wispy negligee. "And if I don't stop eating these things I will soon be disgustingly broad," she added.

"Never," I said. "And even if you did broaden here and

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there—which you never would—it would only be that much more beauty to admire.”

“*Grazie*,” she murmured. “Soch nize-a manners for—eh.”

“For a cop,” I finished. “Tell me, Countess, when were you and Beau to be married?”

She shrugged and the negligee slipped off one shoulder. “You Americans always want a neat legal solution,” she complained. “We did not—what do your teenagers call it?—we did not go steady. Beau saw other women—many of them.”

“Was Mr. Haggerty’s secretary among them?” I asked, remembering Jean Samson’s anger at Victor’s talk against the man just killed.

“*Il Salmone*? Yes, he saw here.”

“Why *Salmone*?”

Another shrug. “The cold feesh—that swims with soch determination up the rivers.”

I finished the croissant, drank a sip of coffee and reached for my cigarettes. “Perhaps Miss Samson is ambitious to the point of single-minded purpose,” I suggested. “Surely you of all people shouldn’t condemn that in a woman, Countess.”

I bent my head to take the light from my Zippo but I could feel the look she gave me. For the first time her voice lacked its practiced poise when she answered me.

“I soppose ambeetion is to be applauded in everyone,” she said. “But a woman should never lose her warmth and—what is the word?—*attrattiva*, charm, in reaching for whatever it is she wants so badly, eh, Captain?”

I watched the end of my cigarette to make sure it didn’t go out. “You kept that in mind on the way up, eh, Vicki?” I asked mildly.

There was a stark silence on the other side of the table. I kept on watching the smoke drift up from my cigarette. Perhaps I didn’t dare look at L’Orazzi or perhaps I figured

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she deserved the chance to recover from the sneak punch without my eyes on her.

She did pretty well, at that. "Veeki?" she asked. "My name is Cristina, Captain, but it is a long time since anyone called me that. Beau called me Carino and the Count—"

"And Victor Haggerty called you Vicki Vanoy that night when you were a blonde and you got in trouble with him in that hotel room," I broke in. "Or don't you remember that?"

I'm not sure what I expected, rage, hysterics, bald denial, even scratching fingernails, but I sure wasn't ready for what did come. When the silence stretched out a little too far I raised my eyes and found the beautiful brunette across the table staring at me with one corner of her mouth curved wryly.

She couldn't drop the accent completely, not after all these years of perfecting it and practicing it, but it almost disappeared. "So you know all about me, eh?" she asked. "And so you've got it all figured out, haven't you? I swore I'd kill that unspeakable bastard some day and so I had it all fixed for Mister Victor Goddam Haggerty to break his neck on that crazy diving machine." Her hand went out to the little gold mesh bag near her plate and she opened its snap to pull out a long, crimson-tipped cigarette. She tapped it on a silvered thumbnail, regarding me steadily and with no apparent fear at all.

"There's only one big question," she went on after a pause. "If I could gimmick that machine without anybody seeing me, just why did I make Beau Sparrow use it to kill himself? How could I hurt Victor Haggerty by getting Sparrow killed? And believe me, Captain Burke, Victor Haggerty is the—" she used an Italian word I didn't have to look up later—"I want to see suffer. He's the only man in the world I hate."

"That's why you came back to these parts?" I asked. She

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nodded, snapping her thin jeweled lighter. "I wondered about that," I went on. "Why would the Countess Orazzi come back to a place where there was a chance she'd be uncovered as Annette Venacci?"

She exhaled a long grey-blue stream of smoke. "There was nothing wrong with Annie Venacci," she said quietly, reflectively. "She was young, she was stupid, but she was a good kid until Victor Haggerty went to work on her." She looked down at her hands, then twisted the loose diamond ring that Beau Sparrow had been sent after, around and around the long, pointed finger. "It doesn't make any difference now," she went on after a pause, "but Annie wasn't peddling anything when she went to that hotel with Haggerty. Later she did—oh, not that crassly, of course, but it amounted to the same thing; take a lover who could get you one step closer to where you wanted to get—yes, she did about everything she had to, later. But when she left that dirty little night club with Victor Haggerty she thought she was going to get that dreamed-of big break in the movies."

Her great dark eyes came up from her study of her hands. "I told you she was stupid," she said. "She should have known what Haggerty was after—maybe subconsciously she was ready to give it; I don't know. But she'd read all those fan magazines that told about how the wealthy patron discovered the girl waiting tables or car hopping or running an elevator and this was it. Later she found out it was It, all right, but not the kind of It she'd had in mind."

Her mouth crooked bitterly at the memory. "In case you have the idea that Annie started screaming for help when Victor Haggerty put his hand on her knee, it wasn't quite like that. I said the kid probably was ready to go the route for the big break but not the kind of route the respected Mister Haggerty suggested. To spell it out for you, that louse wanted her to—"

"Never mind," I broke in. "You don't have to dot the

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i's or cross the *t*'s. But what I can't understand is why this didn't come out in the trial?"

The Countess' smile grew more lop-sided. "I wuz framed," she burlesqued. "Looking back on it, the court-appointed lawyer might as well have been on Haggerty's payroll if he really wasn't. When I told him the true story he looked shocked and said we certainly couldn't bring that up in court; nobody would believe it and the judge would make it just that much harder on me for besmirching the fair name of Haggerty out of spite." She pulled hard at her cigarette. "I told you I was a dumb kid," she said. "Dumb and scared and still confident that the good guys would beat the bad guys, no matter how dark it might look for our side." The smoke jetted from between her crimson lips as she laughed mirthlessly. "We used to discuss this theory quite a bit at the finishing school, as the respectable people called it when they complained about how we vicious young whores were being pampered at the taxpayers' expense."

Her voice never lost its cultured modulation during all of this, not even bearing down on the word "whores." Her mouth was bitter and her eyes were hard but that beautiful voice kept its delightful tone. I wondered again at the amount of study and self-training that had gone into the making of the Countess Orazzi and she became then (and still is) one of the most *admired* women in my book, regardless of what she might or might not have done.

I finished my coffee, tapped my mouth with the serviette and stood up. "It's a beautiful morning to spend in the company of a beautiful lady," I told Annette Venacci, "but I have work to do. Thanks for the coffee and the croissant. Thanks for levelling with me, too."

She shrugged, her mouth still cynically twisted. "What would have been the use of not levelling, policeman?" she asked. "You knew all the answers, anyway. Maybe it did me good to be Annie Venacci again for awhile. Then,

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too, unless you bugged this balcony somehow I can always deny I said anything like this. I can cry I wuz framed again."

"The balcony isn't bugged, Countess," I told her, "and I don't know what purpose would be served in spilling this story, anyway, if it ends here."

She narrowed her eyes slightly. "What do you mean, if it ends here?"

"You came back to these parts to settle your accounts with Victor Haggerty," I said. "This accident—if that's what it was—was inconvenient to your plans but it might have been one of the luckiest things that ever happened to you. Anyway, we know who you are now, Countess, and you wouldn't be foolish enough to go through with whatever you had in mind about getting revenge on Haggerty. So take my advice and close the book on him. Between you and me and the croissants, he's not worth risking the loss of all you've made for yourself and landing back behind a wall with a number on that lovely chest."

She unconsciously looked down at the tawny, sweetly valleyed expanse of breast that showed above the negligee, as though seeing it covered by grey denim that bore a stencilled number. Then she looked back at me and shook her head.

"I guess you're right, Amos Burke," she said. "I'm not as young as I was when I wore a number and I've gotten used to the little comforts. Besides, I suppose the revenge is never as sweet as we imagine it would be—my kind might have turned out to be *abbastanza orribile*, pretty dreadful."

"You actually were going to marry Haggerty, weren't you?" I said. "He gave you that ring Beau Sparrow took such violent exception to, didn't he?"

"How did you figure that?"

"You said the Count gave it to you but I couldn't see you wearing a valuable stone like that so long without having

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the ring made smaller. It looked to me like a ring that had just been presented to you and a stone that size spelled money, and that nodded the head at Haggerty."

She gave her crooked smile and nodded. "You figured right, policeman," she said. "That's why Beau hated it so. Poor Beau; he knew there was no real engagement, that I needed him only to get close to Haggerty, but he—he got ideas. He actually got jealous—can you imagine it?"

"Easy," I said. "And when you took Victor away from his wife and married him, what then? Poison in his soup?"

She shook her head. "Nothing quite so simple. As a matter of fact, I was going to play it by ear when the time came but—well, our wedding night would have been one Haggerty would remember for a long time. I know I swore to kill him but since then I've discovered that for a man like Victor Haggerty, humiliation can hurt a lot worse than a knife or a bullet. And I'd half-planned some dandy little humiliations for him when he and the Countess Orazzi, the new Missus Haggerty, were alone at last."

"I can imagine," I said soberly.

"No you can't," she said and darted me a quizzical look. "I suppose I've laid myself open to some charge or other, haven't I?" she asked mockingly. "What happens now? Do you take me downtown with you or—what's the term—stake out this apartment or what?"

"Damned if I know, exactly," I confessed. "I've lost track of one material witness already and I'd hate to have you disappear, too. D'you suppose you could give me your word that you'll be available, you won't leave town, until this thing is cleared up?"

Her eyes widened. "My word? You'd take the word of little Annie, the shakedown artist who preys on helpless multimillionaires?"

"Pardon the trite reply," I said, "but when I look at you

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I can't help saying to myself that Annie doesn't live here any more. Or are you too young to remember that song?"

"*Che cavaliere nobile*," she laughed. "Of course I remember the song. And thank you again for offering to take my word that I won't try to run away until this thing, as you put it, is cleared up. Who was the witness you lost, Banner?"

"Let's say we temporarily misplaced him," I amended. "Why did you think it was Banner? You haven't seen him around, have you?"

"No, but he had the look of a man who might bolt in panic," she explained. "Victor treated him a little more brutally than his other employees, if that's possible." Her nose wrinkled. "What a beast he is," she went on. "To his poor wife, to his underlings, to everybody he meets—except me and—well, yes, he seems afraid to be more than mildly rude to that cold-fish secretary of his, Jean Samson."

"The salmon you mentioned?"

"Yes, and I wonder why he doesn't treat her as bad as he does everyone else? Does she know where the body's buried? I'm sure she is or has been his mistress but that in itself wouldn't make Haggerty hesitate to treat her vilely." She reached over to stub out her cigarette. "Yes, I would be very interested in *Il Salomone's* hold over Victor Haggerty if I were a handsome captain of Homicide," she told me.

"I have her down in my appointment book," I said. "She doesn't know it yet, but we're due for a chat."

"Wear something warm," the Countess advised. "Ten minutes close to that one and you're bound to suffer a chill unless you're bundled up." She gave a short laugh. "Listen to the cat. Next you'll think *I* was jealous over the fact that Beau amused himself with her from time to time."

"Are you sure you weren't?" I asked. "From what they tell me, he was a prize trophy that any woman would give her eyeteeth to call hers."

"So far as I was concerned, they were welcome to him,

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once he'd served my purpose," the Countess said lightly. "Let's get one thing straight, Captain Burke. I liked Beau; he was amusing most of the time and, to put it delicately, he was an accomplished lover. But I wouldn't have bothered with him if he hadn't been painting Mrs. Haggerty. I needed an unobtrusive entree into Haggerty's circle, such as it is, and Beau provided it. I went along with him to *Versez Souci* when Mrs. Haggerty had her sittings and while Beau painted I wove my little spells around Victor—it was as simple as that."

"Sparrow understood his role?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, and at first it was perfectly all right with him so long as I—ah—was congenial with him. When he showed signs of taking our phoney engagement seriously and acting like a spoiled brat, I got bored with him."

I thought over what L'Orazzi had just told me. "Dr. MacLean said Liz Haggerty had her breakdown about six months ago and the portrait must have been started some time after that. So how—"

"I know what you're going to ask," she broke in, "and no, I didn't meet Beau in Mexico a year ago. I've known him for quite a while—he was older than he looked, incidentally. It was by coincidence that I heard he was doing Mrs. Haggerty's portrait so I renewed our acquaintance on a basis of you do what I ask and I'll be nice to you."

"He was older than he looked?" I asked. "I judged him at about twenty-five; how old was he?"

"*Dio mio*, I don't know; possibly in his middle thirties. I know he looked the same when I first met him in Italy right after I married the Count and that wasn't yesterday."

"In Italy? Was he studying art there?"

She shrugged. "We didn't inquire into a person's background too thoroughly. He was an unattached, good-looking American with money and manners and that was enough to get him anywhere he wanted to go."

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"Money?"

"Oh, yes," she said carelessly. "He always had plenty of money."

"A rich father, or did he sell a lot of paintings?"

She gave a brief laugh. "I don't know about his father but his paintings—have you ever seen any of his work? No? It might interest you."

"In what way?" I asked.

Another shrug of the tawny shoulders. "Why not see for yourself, my friend?"

"I intend to, right away," I said. "Good-bye for now."

"*Ciao*," she said, and then burlesqued: "Or 'ow you say, so long-a, *Capitano*."

3.

When I got to Beau Sparrow's apartment, a three-room layout in a good section of town, Les Hall hit me in the face with some big news as soon as I walked in.

"You must have known something, Amos," he said at the threshold, "telling Tim to look behind the sofa for twenty thousand bucks."

"Huh?" I asked brilliantly.

"It wasn't behind the sofa but it was a hell of a lot more than twenty thousand," the sergeant grinned. "We were looking the place over and Tim came across a suitcase in a bedroom closet. It was full of pretty money—about two hundred thousand dollars' worth, at a quick glance."

I looked around for Tim and Hall explained, "He took it downtown to have the serial numbers checked. Not that I think they'll come up with anything; this was mostly old,

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used stuff and the highest denomination was a hundred. It didn't look like any bank or armored-car haul."

"Maybe Sparrow didn't approve of the income tax," I suggested. "The money could be earnings from his painting."

Les half-turned and gestured toward the rooms behind him. "This junk?" he asked. "Maybe I don't know art but five will get you ten if Beau Sparrow made cigarette money with his painting unless the world's gone nuttier than I thought. Take a look."

I went inside and looked around. The largest room in the apartment had been outfitted with a skylight to make it a studio. The second room was an exquisitely decorated living room and the third and smallest room was Beau's bedroom, tastefully decorated, everything in it high-priced and worth the money. The whole apartment would have been a gem if it hadn't been for the paintings that covered the walls. They were bad, very bad.

I don't mean that they were wild, far-out abstracts. No, they were amateurish daubs mounted in expensive frames, still lifes, landscapes, portraits that all had one thing in common, a total lack of imagination or sincerity, much less talent. No wonder the critics had been so caustic when they had lambasted Sparrow's one-man show at the Midtown Galleries.

In the studio stood an easel on which there was a large, half-finished canvas that showed a crude background of Greek restaurant hills, temples and waterfalls toward which was retreating a nude with the rear end of an exaggerated Rubens. Glancing over one shoulder with a nauseating coyness that apparently was meant to be seductive was the recognizable face of none other than Jean Samson, *Il Sal-mone*. Sparrow had traced her features so painstakingly that it was obvious that he'd augmented his sittings, if any, with repeated references to a photograph; the face held no personality at all, not even Samson's stand-offishness.

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While I was regarding this horror, the apartment door opened and Tim Tilson came in. "How do you like her?" he asked. "Do you suppose she's really that big back there when she takes off her girdle?"

"Naw, it's this symbolic stuff you read about," Les explained. "It's supposed to mean she hated her first-grade teacher or something."

"Well, I had teachers who gave me a pain in—"

"Never mind the discussion on symbolism," I broke in. "How did the money check out?"

Tilson shook his head. "Nothing on the first go-round," he said. "They're looking it over bill-by-bill now and that will take some time but the once-over-lightly check didn't turn up a single posted serial number. How do you figure it, Captain?"

I shook my head. "After looking at Sparrow's paintings, I'm inclined to agree with Les," I said. "It's hard to believe anybody would pay good money for these smears but of course we have to remember that Liz Haggerty, at least, commissioned him to do her portrait. Or rather Dr. MacLean did. Maybe that was Sparrow's forte, painting portraits of sick people. Maybe his brand of art was just what the doctor ordered."

Hall said, "According to Sparrow's appointment book, Mrs. Haggerty must have been the only one sick enough to take it. Nothing but blank pages except for the Haggerty sittings."

I remembered Angela Wyckoff's blithe comment. "I understood women were falling all over themselves trying to get Sparrow to paint their portrait. That was supposed to be the reason he could live it up the way he did."

"Uh-huh, I heard the same thing," the sergeant said, "but when I tried to find some of these ladies to ask them a few questions they got awfully hard to locate. Either they're so

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ashamed of being taken by Sparrow that they've clammed up or he spread the story himself to account for his dough."

"And you think it's the latter case," I said.

He nodded. "Sure, it figures that Sparrow was in some kind of a racket and he used his art as a front. He knew enough about painting to talk a good picture, I suppose, and with his looks and this charm he was supposed to be lousy with, people just took it for granted that he really did con old ladies into paying him big dough for his portraits."

"Could be," I agreed.

"Everything points to it," Hall said. "The money in the suitcase, the rental on this apartment, the furniture, even the high-priced booze in the liquor cabinet—he had to have some kind of racket going for him, Captain."

"What kind of racket?" I asked.

He hunched his shoulders. "Take your choice; blackmail, narcotics, stolen art—you know there's quite a business these days in peddling fakes that're supposed to be masterpieces stolen from museums in Europe. As I understand it, only half the stuff lifted in those big robberies of the past year or so has been recovered."

"How about this?" Tilson put in eagerly. "Sparrow was part of an international stolen art ring. The phoney Countess, Vicki Vanoy, was—"

"Hold it," I said. "Whatever else she may be, she's not a phoney countess. Those reports you showed me said she really did marry an Italian count named Orazzi. Matter of fact, she told me she met Sparrow in Italy soon after she married the count."

Our Timothy was not dismayed. "Okay, but suppose the count was one of these impoverished noblemen and—"

"Oh, God," Les groaned.

"Well, Europe's full of 'em," Tilson said defensively. "Suppose Orazzi was suffering from the tights so he used his title to get around and case the villas of his wealthy friends

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and lay out art robberies for the professional thieves? Beau Sparrow was in the gang, disposing of the stuff over here. He got greedy and held out on the syndicate and—”

“Hold your hats; here comes the Cosa Nostra,” Les jeered.

“—and they sent the countess over here to take care of Sparrow.”

When Tim paused to draw breath and consider his next lurid development, Les said, “So Vicki Vanoy arranged with Charlie Banner and Victor Haggerty to gimmick the Trampo-board so that in case Beau Sparrow *did* try to dive off it he’d bang his head against the side of the pool. Sure, it’s obvious, Tim.”

“Uh-huh,” I put in, “except that the bang on the head didn’t kill Beau Sparrow. So far, nobody’s been able to decide what *did* kill Beau Sparrow.”

Tim Tilson was only slightly crestfallen. “There may be a couple of points to be cleared up,” he admitted, “but I still think we’re on the right track.”

“Where do you get that *we* stuff?” Les asked. “That track is all yours, son.”

“Well, then,” Tim asked, “how do you figure it?”

The veteran sergeant said thoughtfully: “The way I figure it, it doesn’t play as big as your idea, Tim, but in this business you usually find that the truth is pretty corny. With what I have to go on, I’d say Beau Sparrow had an accident, something went wrong with the Trampoboard. This stuff we’ve turned up that makes it look as though he was in some kind of racket came to light only because he was unlucky enough to break his neck or whatever he did to himself—there’s no connection between the accident and the racket.”

“I don’t buy that,” Tim protested.

“Okay, but you know it happens all the time; something a man’s been hiding for years comes to light when he has an

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accident. A bank teller sprains his ankle so he can't gimmick the books when the examiners drop in, a bigtime hood on the Ten Most Wanted List stays out of sight of everybody until he drives two miles an hour too fast through a school zone—things like that."

He looked at me. "How does Burke's Law figure it?" he asked.

"Burke's Law," I said, "still says that coincidental accidents that occur in murky situations must be suspect. And God knows the situation at Victor Haggerty's place was murky enough."

I left it at that while I went over the apartment, looking for I didn't know what. Outside of some splashes of green paint on the studio floor, the place was too immaculate to belong to a working artist, at least compared with the studios of some painters I knew. The longer I was in the place the more it emerged as a front, part of the window dressing Beau Sparrow needed to pose as a bona fide artist instead of what he may have really been.

"You two had better give this apartment a real going over," I said when I was finally ready to leave. "Look for hiding places, false-bottomed drawers, secret desk compartments, the whole schmeer. I've got another call to make."

"Jean Samson?" Tilson asked me. When I nodded, he said, "It figured."

"Hey, Captain, I forgot to ask: how did you make out with the Countess?" Les asked. "Did she pull an act and deny she'd ever heard of anybody named Vicki Vanoy?"

"No," I said. "On the contrary, she admitted everything. She even told me she came back to her old stamping grounds for the one purpose of making Victor Haggerty pay through the well-known nose for what he did to her when she was a blond named Vicki."

"Well, that definitely makes her a suspect, doesn't it?" Tim Tilson asked.

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"I don't see how," I said. "She explained that she was going to get Haggerty to shed his wife and marry her, then stick in the knife and twist hard."

"Neat," Les said approvingly.

"Very neat," I agreed, "but if she planned to marry Haggerty—and she had him to the point where he gave her a ten-carat diamond or thereabouts—why would she try to kill him? Always assuming that she could fix that Trampoboard somehow, or arrange to have it fixed."

"Maybe she really meant to kill Sparrow," Tim offered. "Maybe *she* threw the ring in the pool and told him to dive after it."

"Maybe," I said, "but why? According to her story, everything was proceeding according to plan. She had Haggerty just about hooked. Beau may have been kicking up a little with his late-blooming jealousy but having become a little better acquainted with her during the past few hours I can't imagine the Countess Orazzi not being able to handle Beau Sparrow without having to kill him."

"Sure," Les Hall agreed. "Anybody smart enough to make a countess out of little Vicki Vanoy would never arrange a killing like that, *before* she got Haggerty where she wanted him. She'd know that a police investigation might show her up for who she really was and there would go her revenge." He peered at me and asked: "What's the matter, Captain? You look as though something's bugging you—something more than this mixed-up mess, I mean."

"Something is and it's mixed up with the rest of the mess," I said, "but don't ask me what it is." I looked around the apartment again, at the terrible paintings on the walls, the Samson nude on the easel, at the green spots on the studio floor, and shook my head. I didn't say it out loud but I had the uneasy feeling that there was something here in this place that was important if I could just grasp it and that I was just too dense to see it.

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I looked at the Samson figure with the outsized fanny and told myself that maybe Victor Haggerty's secretary, who had amused Beau Sparrow from time to time, according to the countess, could give me a hint as to where to go from there.

4.

When I finally talked my way through the outer perimeter of underlings surrounding Jean Samson's office, I found her behind a desk in a spacious office that was decorated in perfect taste but which was as cold as the lady herself. Or as cold as she pretended to be, at any rate.

She was talking on the telephone when I was ushered in and she flipped a hand toward a chair on the opposite side of the big desk as she kept on talking.

"Then what *is* the delay?" she demanded. "I understand your problem but NASA doesn't understand ours. We're already behind in our delivery of the Prometheus System so why—"

She waited while the man at the other end of the line made explanations that I imagined were fairly frantic.

"Elco?" she asked when the other end finished. "Pay the difference." A two-second pause and then: "You *have* authorization, Mr. Clark. I just gave it to you."

She hung up the phone, said "How do you do, Captain?" and immediately flipped the switch of the intercom on her desk.

"Yes, Miss Samson?" The female genie in the box was prompt, as though leaping to answer the summons.

"Miss Griffen," said the Countess's *Il Salmone*, "take a

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memo to Mr. Haggerty. Have authorized Clark, Toronto Division, to break bottleneck of silicon cells by purchase from Elco at two per cent above estimate. Do you have that, Miss Griffen?"

"Yes, Miss Samson," said the genie and Jean Samson snapped off the intercom.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Captain Burke," she said briskly. She didn't sound sorry in the least.

"I was fascinated," I said. "One word from you and our missile program gets back in gear. You wield great power, Miss Samson."

"It's Mr. Haggerty's power, Captain," she said. "I'm just his secretary even though I have to speak for him occasionally when there's a critical time element involved. It happens very rarely." Enough of this idle chit-chat. "What can I do for you, Captain Burke?"

I settled back in my chair and found that although it might look comfortable it was built to make the spine of a gabby caller start complaining in about ten seconds. "For openers," I said, "you might tell me about Beau Sparrow."

If that beautiful frozen face could get frostier, it did at mention of Sparrow. "I knew very little about him," she said.

"Oh?" I sounded very surprised. "Why, I was told that you went out with him quite a bit. You must have formed some opinion about him."

"Is my opinion a police matter?" Her voice was coated with rime.

"It would be helpful," I said.

For a second I thought she was going to try to freeze me out with some executive-type nothing but she fooled me. For the briefest instant, her face softened and she came out with: "In many ways Beau Sparrow was like a little boy."

It was really something, the superefficient, unemotional Jean Samson owning a mothering instinct, especially since

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according to the countess the "little boy" she mentioned was older than she was. I kept my face from showing my surprise and said, "He got engaged to a big girl."

Now that she had given me a glimpse at what she might be like beneath the shell, Jean Samson let another emotion get past her guard. This time her eyes showed me a dislike that came close to hate. "You mean the woman who calls herself Countess Orazzi?" she asked. When I nodded she gave me a smile, of sorts. "Even if that so-called engagement meant anything—which it didn't—wouldn't it just go to prove that it was like a little boy to be impressed by a title, no matter how phoney?"

I raised my eyebrows. "Do you mean the Countess Orazzi isn't really a countess, Miss Samson?"

She twitched her perfectly moulded shoulders under her severe, elegant suit. "I'm sure I couldn't care less," she told me. "And I have a lot of business to clean up."

"So do I," I said. "A man's death, for instance."

She held my eyes with hers. "You saw the accident. You're acting as though it were murder."

"It's a bad habit with homicide cops," I said. "Where did you first meet Beau Sparrow, Miss Samson?"

She gave an exasperated gesture with her hands. "I really don't remember. It was quite a while ago. I assure you I don't keep a diary to write such things as 'Tonight I met the most adorable man,' Captain Burke."

"I'm sure you don't, but was it when Sparrow began painting Mrs. Haggerty's portrait or before?"

"I don't remem—yes, it must have been. Of course; I was at *Versez Souci* for dinner one evening and Dr. MacLean had brought Beau to talk to Mr. Haggerty. That's when I first met him."

"I see." I paused a second and then asked, "How well do you know Dr. MacLean?"

She heaved an exaggerated sigh but her answer was quiet.

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enough. "I presume you mean have I gone out with him, too? The answer is yes, a few times. Dinner and once to watch thoracic surgery."

"To watch what?" I suppose I yelped the question.

"That surprises you? Surgery was my first love. I took pre-med before I switched to law."

"You have a law degree?" I asked. When she nodded, I said, "What made you change from medicine?"

She grimaced slightly. "Women in medicine are limited to research, pediatrics or dermatology," she said. "None of those fields appealed to me."

"I have an idea you'd have had those restrictions lifted," I said. "I've heard you described as a person who enjoys swimming against the current."

"Indeed? I don't know whether to regard that as a compliment or not."

"Oh, the person who said that intended it as a compliment," I lied. Then I switched back to the detoured subject. "I'm sure Dr. MacLean's interest in you wasn't limited to your enthusiasm for—thoracic surgery, was it? Did the good doctor perhaps resent your seeing Beau Sparrow?"

Her chin lifted. The ice cap was in place again. "Ridiculous," she informed me. "Dr. MacLean couldn't be that petty."

"Could you be—about Countess Orazzi?"

She sniffed. "Any interest I may have had in Beau Sparrow wasn't romantic, Captain Burke. I thought he had a great potential that was largely wasted. I wanted him to do something meaningful with his life."

"You can't mean his painting," I said.

"Don't be contemptuous of artists, Captain. Who was chief of police in Rome when Michelangelo was painting?"

I thought a while and then snapped my fingers. "Dammit, I had the name right on the tip of my tongue," I said. Her features relaxed about one forty-fourth of one degree. It

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wasn't much but it was something. "Tell me," I asked, "did your interest in Beau's future as a painter date back to before he started that study of you or after?"

She permitted herself to show almost open surprise. "Study of me? I never posed for Beau. Not that I wouldn't have been happy to."

"I wonder," I said. "The study of you that I saw at his place was a nude."

Damned if Miss Jean Samson couldn't blush! A faint pink tinge stained her neck at the collar of the beautiful suit. "Well—artists consider the human form objectively. If Beau made an imaginative study of me in the nude it was only because he—er—liked the way I carried myself, nothing more. I don't expect you to understand that but it must have been that way."

"Well, you know how cops are," I said. "They ain't got no culture. Me, I'm a guy that likes the pitchers they got in *Playboy*."

Another sniff. "Oh, yes," she said coolly. "I forgot that Captain Amos Burke is the millionaire who dabbles in police work as a hobby. You probably have a houseful of original Picasso's, haven't you?"

"Below the belt," I grinned. "I apologize. Getting back to Beau and his art. You say you didn't see much of his work—what did you think of what you saw?"

"Because I didn't understand it doesn't mean that it wasn't good, even great," she said. "If you could have heard him explain what he was reaching for, the longtime inhibitions in art that he was trying to demolish, you'd have understood why I thought he had a great potential."

Les Hall had said that Sparrow probably knew enough about art to "talk a good picture"; what Jean Samson said seemed to prove that Les was right.

"One thing more," I said when she began reaching for

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papers on her desk to close the interview. "Did Beau ever mention any rich relatives?"

She frowned. "Why, no. Why do you ask?"

"It's routine to find out all we can about anybody who meets with sudden death, accidental or otherwise," I explained. "We're interested in where Beau Sparrow got the money to support himself in the style to which he'd apparently been accustomed for a good many years. We're pretty sure he didn't earn it with his art so the obvious question is, where did it come from?"

She shook her head again in an unconscious gesture. It was pretty obvious that she had never thought about Beau's prosperity before this: perhaps she'd taken it for granted that handsome young artists with potential were fed by ravens.

"No," she said slowly. "I don't know where his income came from." She got back her executive mask in a hurry. "And now I really do have to ask you to pardon me, Captain. I have a great deal of work to do."

"I have quite a bit to do myself," I told her, "so let's get right to the point, shall we? Why did you sign Victor Haggerty's name to a letter to the police, saying he was afraid somebody was out to kill him?"

She gave me a level look and her voice dripped disdain. "Are you accusing me of forgery?" she asked. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Yes, you do, Miss Samson," I said. "That letter to the Commissioner that Victor denied sending has been checked by experts and they say the signature's genuine."

"Then why accuse me of signing it?" she asked icily. "Don't you trust your own experts?"

"Yes, but the signatures they compared this one to all necessarily cleared this office," I explained. "I just heard you on the phone transacting what seemed to be a mighty important piece of business in Victor Haggerty's name. You

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obviously have been delegated a great deal of authority, so I wondered if perhaps that authority might not extend to signing his name whenever necessary. Those signatures the experts used as samples of Haggerty's writing could very well be in your hand, couldn't they?"

Her mouth thinned as she shook her head. "Wrong," she told me. "Whenever I have to sign anything for Mr. Haggerty I always put the initials J.S. under his. Without seeming to brag, my own signature carries as much weight in business circles as Mr. Haggerty's—why would I need to copy his name on anything?"

"But this was no business matter, this letter to the Commissioner," I said. "Haggerty denies he sent it, the signature checks out, so there's only one explanation left. I'll revise my question, Miss Samson. Why did you slip that note to the Commissioner in with a bushel of business letters you must give Haggerty to sign each evening? Trusting your business acumen as much as he obviously does, he wouldn't read them—you probably stand at his elbow and whisk them in front of him and away with a couple of words to tell him what they're about."

"Ridiculous," she said but the old icy tone had a crack in it.

"Why did you want police protection for Haggerty a couple of days before that Trampoboard gizmo backfired and killed Beau Sparrow?" I went on. "Did you know Banner was going to plant the gimmicked springboard? Or had Beau Sparrow fallen so deeply in love with Countess Orazzi that he was planning something rash to keep Victor Haggerty from having her? Did Beau tell you something that made you fear for Haggerty's safety?"

"Ridiculous," she said again but her voice was slightly scratchy, as a phonograph needle caught in a bad groove.

"You deny knowing anything about the letter to the Commissioner?" I asked. "Careful, now: the letter's in the

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Crime Lab and I feel it's only fair to warn you that those boys can come up with some amazing answers."

"I deny nothing nor do I admit anything," she told me with some of the old Jean Samson deep-freeze back in her voice. "If you have any charges to make against me, make them so I can inform our legal department that I need a lawyer. If you're on a fishing expedition, you've come to the wrong place. I've asked you to leave and now I must insist."

I grinned at her. "And if I don't leave, what are you going to do, call the police?" I asked.

Her face went white with anger and I got ready to duck one of the desk ornaments. She might have thrown something, too, if the intercom hadn't chosen that moment to buzz. Jean Samson snapped the switch and a voice said: "For Captain Burke on number three."

The blonde frowned her annoyance but she pressed a button and pushed one of the four phones on her desk in my direction. I picked it up and found George McLeod on the other end of the line.

"Les said you'd gone to Haggerty's office," he explained, "and I thought you'd want to know this as soon as it came in. The Crime Lab just finished its examination of the whad-dayacallit, the dingus that Sparrow got hurt on. They say the three critical bolts in the thing had their threads ripped smooth."

"What does that mean?" I asked. "Was the Trampoboard tampered with before it went off or were the bolts ripped smooth when it went haywire and threw Sparrow?"

He hesitated and then said, "Captain, it's one of the few times I ever heard those brains down in the lab admit they weren't sure which. The bolt threads could have been filed and the nuts could have done the rest or the pressure of the wrong-way lift could have done the whole bit."

"Which leaves us exactly where we were before," I said.

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"Right on the corner of Did-He-Fall Street and Was-He-Pushed Avenue."

"Uh-huh," George said sympathetically and then his tone brightened. "Well, here's some good news—or I guess it is, anyway. Our man on Charlie Banner's office just called to say your boy has showed up at Norelec. He's in his office right now, taking a shower and swallowing bromos, according to our man's guess. The word is that Banner looks like death warmed over—a king-sized hangover."

"I'd better get over there before he starts putting out the fire and starting a new one," I told McLeod.

"Yeah," George said. "And, Captain?"

"Yes?"

"When I talked to Les and Tim I asked them if they'd turned up anything new on Sparrow. They said maybe it didn't mean a thing but a can of tooth powder in Sparrow's bathroom checked out as something besides the stuff that makes you wonder where the yellow went."

"Such as?"

"Well, it's sort of old-fashioned in these days of mainliners but your Mr. Sparrow had a sizable supply of cocaine scattered around his place in cute containers."

"I'll be damned," I exclaimed. "For export or home use?" This last to keep as much as I could from Jean Samson who was big-eared me and trying not to show it.

"Hard to say. But if he was a user wouldn't it show up in the autopsy? I'll check with the coroner and find out. If he wasn't on the stuff he must have been a pusher, with the amount of C. he had on hand."

"That might account for a lot of things, George," I said. "Maybe we're starting to get somewhere."

"Maybe," George McLeod said unenthusiastically. "I may be dumb but finding out Beau Sparrow had some connection with drugs doesn't make the case any less an accident, does it?"

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I thought it over and had to agree with McLeod. "No," I admitted finally, "I don't guess it does."

When I hung up I looked at Jean Samson, waiting. She tried to show me how busy she was by scowling at a letter, putting it down and picking up another sheaf of papers and frowning at them in deep concentration. When I laughed, she looked up.

"You find something humorous, Captain?" she asked.

"Uh-huh," I nodded. "You, fighting yourself to keep from asking what that phone call was all about."

She started to sniff and say *ridiculous!*, no doubt, but it didn't come off. Her mouth went up at one corner and when she looked at me her eyes were suddenly quite girlish, with something that looked suspiciously like laughter in their grey depths.

"All right," she said in a voice totally unlike *Il Salmone's*, "would it make your day if I stepped on my pride and begged you for the latest news from headquarters?"

"That's my girl," I said enthusiastically. "Now you sound like the Jeannie Samson who was the most popular girl in the senior class. Before she got all tied up in Prometheus missiles and thoracic surgery and stuff. As for the news from headquarters, it looks as though you're going to be right and Beau Sparrow's splash will turn out to have been an accident, nothing more."

"I told you so," she said.

"Uh-huh; that was about the only thing you did tell me," I said. I made a bluff of turning away from the desk and gave it to her over my shoulder. "Oh, yes," I said, "of course you knew Beau Sparrow used cocaine, didn't you?" Then I whipped around so I could see the effect.

Her new soft look vanished and the icy curtain came down fast but not until a wave of something close to terror whitened her classic-featured face.

"No," she lied. "I don't believe it. And even—" She

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stopped short, biting down on what she had been about to say.

"And even if you did, he's dead now so what difference does it make? That's what you were going to say, wasn't it?"

"Of course not," she lied again, then bleated, "Please go away, Captain Burke—just go away!"

5.

So I went. I had to see Charles P. Banner before he possibly began lushing it up to get over his hangover and, besides, I couldn't see that there was much to be gained by staying and hammering at Jean Samson any longer. I was pretty sure she'd known that Beau Sparrow was a user (of cocaine, of all things, and that's why no needle marks showed up on his corpse for the coroner's edification) but that in itself proved nothing. If Sparrow pushed the stuff as well as used it, it could explain how he made his money, even though his merchandise wasn't as popular with the addicts as it once had been. Beau's connection with narcotics could even explain his meeting Countess Orazzi in Italy; the drug mob had always homed in on the land of the Mafia.

On my way to Norelec, I looked over what we had and it was as George McLeod had said: We still had a dead man, a curious accident and damned little else. The one big unanswered question that still kept Homicide on the case was the puzzle of how Beau Sparrow died, if it wasn't by brain hemorrhage or drowning or a heart attack or poison, what was it? Just let the P.M. doctor say he had a fractured thorax or an embolism of something explainable and we could drop the case, bingo, like that.

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Yes, we could do this even though it would be breaking Burke's Law that said: Coincidental accidents occurring in murky situations are always suspect.

The letter Jean Samson had gotten Victor Haggerty to sign without his knowledge (or which he had signed himself, knowing what it was, or she or somebody else had forged) was a question mark but not an inexplicable one. In police work we run across dozens of letters that yell for help, make accusations, predict catastrophes, and actually don't mean a thing. Of course most of them are crank letters but occasionally a sane citizen will write such a letter, drop it in a mailbox and two minutes later want it back because (a) the situation which he or she thought was so dangerous has been changed, explained, and the writer feels like a fool to have become so alarmed, or (b) the person who wrote it takes another drink and thereby washes away the hallucinations roused by the previous martini, or (c) the moment of weakness, helplessness, the need for official protection, passes and the writer tells himself in effect: *You can handle this yourself without the cops sticking their nose in your business.*

Jean Samson could have reflected on the possibility of Victor finding out what she had done on an impulse and without his knowledge, and known that her very responsible and no doubt handsomely paid job might be shot from under her if she admitted putting that letter to the Commissioner in with the day's batch for his automatic signature. Victor could have signed the letter himself and then found out something that he thought would make him look less the Big Man if the police entered the case. Or (although the lab said no and the lab was almost never wrong) this still could be the work of a forger.

Charlie Banner's reason for pulling a run-out? I pulled up in front of the guarded gates of Norelec (I was driving

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the Mercedes) and assured myself that it shouldn't take long to find out about that.

Getting in to see Banner was only slightly less complicated than I imagine it would be for a ragged stranger to get into The Room at Omaha. Usually, a badge of captain of police will get a man into most places with a minimum of cross-checking but at Norelec I was held at the gates by a couple of hard-faced security guards until I was cleared sufficiently to be escorted to a building that bore the chaste sign *Admittance*. There I was interviewed by a young lady with a big bosom and a big smile, both false as hell, and asked whom I wished to see, on what business, and the duration of my call.

"I want to see Mr. Banner," I explained. "It's police business and if I lose my temper, which will happen any minute if there's much more of this, the duration of the call will be only so long as it takes me to lead him out of here on our way downtown on a charge of obstructing justice."

No impact on the smile. "I'm sure you understand that the classified nature of the work here at Norelec makes every security precaution necessary, Captain Burke," chirped the busy Miss Admittance.

"Fine," I said. "I'm all for security. But Mr. Banner has put himself in the way of needing a friend on the cops and every minute I'm delayed from seeing him makes me just that much less of a friend."

The dazzling smile widened, the artificial bosom arched. "I believe there's an officer in Mr. Banner's outer ante-room now, Captain," she said. "I'm sure you don't have to worry about Mr. Banner—ah—is *scramming* the word?"

"It used to be," I said. "About 1930 that word was very stylish. Now the more popular terms are to cut out, bug off or keppie. What else would you like to know about the latest slang, Miss—uh?"

"Boughton," she said and glanced down at a name but-

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ton pinned to a shirtwaist that must have contained four cubic feet of sponge rubber. "Alice Boughton."

"And my name's Burke," I said sweetly. "Amos Burke. My friends call me Captain of Homicide."

"I know—" she began but just then the intercom on her desk blared with no preliminary buzzes.

OKAY FOR BURKE! some Jehovah hollered.

Alice Boughton rose and escorted me to an unmarked door set in the rear wall. "One of the security officers will show you where Mr. Banner's office is," she tweeted. "So nice to have met you, Captain Burke." She darted a glance around the admittance office where identically sweet-smiling young ladies frustrated would-be callers on Norelec bigwigs, then lowered her voice conspiratorially. "What did Mr. Banner do this time?" she asked.

"Do?" I asked. "Jeez, honey, he didn't do anything. I just want to see about getting him to make some skyrockets for my grandson's Fourth of July."

She would have stuck her tongue out at me if she had followed her first impulse but as it was she yanked open the door with unnecessary vigor and snapped; "This way, please."

I bounced off her name button and walked outside to have a large man in a khaki uniform and sidearms fall into step beside me. "Right this way, Captain Burke," he said and herded me down a long walk that traversed a sort of campus surrounded by four-story brick buildings, behind which loomed strangely shaped structures that might have been reactors or thermonuclear incubators where they hatched missiles, for all I knew.

"What's His Nibs done this time, Captain?" my guide asked in an undertone as we neared the central building of this quadrangle.

"You're the second person who's asked me that," I said. "Is Banner in the habit of doing things?"

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He shrugged. "You know how it is when a guy can't handle his booze," he said. "He's a swell guy and I'm all for him but he keeps getting his tit in a wringer when he goes on the lush. I just wondered what it was this time, another wrecked car or maybe he went tiger with his fists again?"

"A security officer like you ought to know that loose lips sink ships," I said reprovngly. "Remember, Tojo may be listening."

"Yeah," he said. "Well, there's no harm askin'."

The guard turned me over to another at the doorway of the main building and this fellow led me through a maze of corridors until we came to a tile-walled, antiseptic ante-room where the man Les Hall had stationed, a plainclothesman named Grizzle, rose from a backless bench and gave me the half-salute with which members of Homicide greeted each other.

"Banner's in the White Room now," he told me. "He knows you were coming and he said to let you right in. After you're suited up, of course."

"Suited up?"

"Uh-huh. She'll show you. That's Banner's secretary, Miss Miles." While he was talking, a side door had opened and a tall, flat-chested girl in a white gown and operating room headgear had come in. She approached us, smiling the patent-pending Norelec smile, and Grizzle made the introductions.

"How do you do, Captain?" asked Miss Miles, not really caring. "Mr. Banner asked me to apologize for his not meeting you in his office but because of his mistake he's way behind in conferences, engineering checks. everything. This way, please."

"Half a minute," I said and returned to Grizzle. "Just as a matter of curiosity, how did you get into this place. I mean, if they gave a captain of Homicide such a hard time, how did you convince them that you belonged here, waiting for Banner?"

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"Sergeant Hall tipped me," Grizzle explained. "He said there was only one way to get into these maximum security plants without wasting a lot of time: go around to the back."

"Huh?"

"Yeah, Captain; there's a high back fence but the gate was open and nobody asked any questions. I came past the power plant and the slag heaps, I guess you call them, and asked around until I found where Banner's office was and I just walked in." He grinned at my visible distress. "They've been real nice to me, brought me coffee and let me use the executive john and things like that. Nice people."

"I'm sure," I said dazedly, and went back to Miss Miles. I shouldn't have been surprised, not really; American big business' idea of security has ever been thus, impressive front and an open gate in the back fence.

Miss Miles led me into a small room where there was a rack of white nightgowns similar to the one she was wearing. She handed me one and there didn't seem to be anything for me to do but put it on.

"What mistake was that you mentioned, the one that put Mr. Banner so far behind schedule?" I asked as I stepped into my prophylactic muumuu.

She gave a tinkling laugh. "This morning's NASA conference at Port Arguello was cancelled Friday night. I left a memo for Mr. Banner but he missed it somehow. He flew there direct from Mr. Haggerty's last evening. Here, slip these on."

She handed me a pair of cloth slippers that went on over my shoes.

"And this," said Miss Miles and gave me a cap like hers. "Ever been in a White Room, Captain?"

"No, I haven't," I said. "Should I hold up my hands so you can pull on a pair of rubber gloves, the way doctors do in the movies?"

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Tinkle-tinkle went her laugh, as false as every other pleasantry in this place. "No, you don't have to be quite sterile here," she said, "but, you see, the components we make in the White Room are so sensitive that a dust particle could ruin them. Visitors invariably say it's like playing doctor, dressing up like this, though."

"I haven't played doctor since I was a kid," I told her. "As I remember, it was quite interesting."

Miles made no response to that. Instead, she opened a door at the far end of the dressing room and we stepped out onto a large square grating that made hissing noises.

"This vacuum is for loose dirt in your clothing," my guide explained.

"A man could save a fortune in cleaners' bills," I said and then saw by her expression that I'd done it again: every mortal human who had put on the gown and the cap had made a crack about doctors; everybody who had stepped on the vacuum grating had made a crack about cleaners' bills.

"I'm sorry," I said humbly. "It's been a long day. And when are you going to ask me, Miss Miles?"

She looked at me and for the first time I saw that she had large, violet eyes, very pretty. "Ask you what, Captain?"

"Guess," I invited.

She said quite calmly, "Ask you how Mr. Banner's connected with the Trampoboard accident at Mr. Haggerty's, d'you mean? Why, I just took it for granted that by now the police had proved it was a tragic mechanical error. What else could it have been?"

"What else, indeed?" I murmured and she opened still another door that led into an immense room full of laboratory benches crowded with equipment, surrounded by people in white, illuminated by lights that outshone anything I'd ever seen before but which still were not in the least dazzling and which cast nary a shadow. Remarkable.

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"And there's Mr. Banner, Captain," Miss Miles said in her paid-to-be-pleasant voice.

"Well, hooray," I said. It seemed a week since I'd parked the Mercedes in front of the Norelec gates.

Charlie Banner was leaning over a man seated at one of the benches and when Miss Miles touched his arm he straightened and turned toward me. He looked like hell. His white gown, the merciless lighting, brought out every line in his face, emphasized the pouches under his eyes and made his eyeballs redder than perhaps they really were.

He saw my reaction at sight of him and tried to be jaunty. "Hello, Captain," he said. "What's the matter, never seen a colossal hangover before?" He looked past me at his secretary. "Miss Miles, when you go out, ring maintenance. We're having trouble with the oxygen line at forty-two and forty-three."

"Shall I have him check both, Mr. Banner?" Miles asked.

"No, the nitrogen's okay—just the oxygen."

"Yes, Mr. Banner," Miss Miles said and disappeared.

Banner turned back to me and found me looking about the place. I'd say there were at least a hundred men and women working at the benches, conferring in small groups, doing mysterious things to the mysterious instruments that filled the place.

"Very impressive," I said and turned back to Banner. "I had no idea that Norelec was such a big operation."

He shook his head. "Big? This is a small outfit, actually. In area, at least. But we do handle our share of vital components, even if Haggerty treats us like a stepchild most of the time. This is one of his smallest operations, money-wise, and Victor Haggerty reads only the net profit figures. Technological advance, even national defense, come somewhere back in the ruck." He pressed a hand to his surgeon's cap and wrinkled his broad forehead in pain. "But don't mind me," he went on. "I'm one sick sonofabitch, to coin

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a phrase. I sure hung one on—as you ought to know: you were at Victor's place when I was hanging it."

"Well," I offered, "that accident to Beau Sparrow was enough to make anybody take a couple to calm his nerves."

"Yeah, I took a couple, all right." He looked up at the ceiling, squinting his eyes against the lights. "If I was smart, I'd have kept right on going when I got to Lompoc," he said moodily. "Haggerty is going to crucify me." His blood shot eyes came down to meet mine. "You know he really thinks I tried to kill him with that damned Trampoboard, don't you?"

"Maybe he was just shook up and talking," I said. "A man is apt to sound off with a lot of things he doesn't mean when something like that happens right in front of him."

"Oh, he meant it, all right," Banner said.

I said: "Any idea what went wrong with the Trampo-board?"

He shook his head heavily. "I thought you police would've found out by now. I didn't examine the thing after the accident. I was too plastered and too busy going 'round and 'round with Haggerty. But the obvious answer is that the bolts weren't stressed to take the pull of the springs."

"When Dr. MacLean said the gadget was too dangerous for Haggerty to dive from, you said you'd checked it out," I reminded Banner. "True or false?"

He hesitated and then lifted his heavy shoulders under the white gown. "False," he said bluntly. "I meant to but—well, I got to drinking and I said, what the hell, it's bound to be okay. Winfield would never let me take it out to Haggerty's if there was any chance of it going haywire."

"Who's Winfield?"

"Arthur Winfield, the kid who designed it. One of our bright young men. And no, he's not here. Took off on a vacation Friday after work, hunting in Canada. You can check

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up on him—I suppose his emergency address is around somewhere.”

He pressed the flat of his hand to his forehead again and smothered a groan. “Winfield’s okay, though,” he went on. “The Trampoboard came out of some work we’re doing on a soft-landing lunar instrument package. That’s a device that will let a capsule down without knocking out everybody aboard. Those springs have to absorb a tremendous shock.”

“Apparently they give quite a shock, too,” I said. “Our lab found that the threads on three of the main bolts were stripped clean.”

Banner started to protest, then subsided without speaking. I waited until he finally said, “I know I ought to be a grateful, loyal, rehabilitated drunk and say I’m glad Victor didn’t get on the Trampoboard to get what Sparrow got but—well, if it had been Haggerty I suppose there’d be one hell of a stink and I might go to jail for criminal negligence or something but even so, I wouldn’t be looking forward to the hell on earth Victor Haggerty’s going to make for me from here on in. I should’ve kept on running, I guess.”

I said, “So you knew that NASA conference at Port Arguello had been canceled, huh?”

“Sure,” he said. “I didn’t know where I was going but it seemed like a good idea to get on my way.” He gave a bitter laugh. “Maybe I was going to defect to the Red Chinese. Anyway, when the booze started wearing thin I knew I had to come back. There’s too much important stuff right on the verge here and even if Victor nails me to the cross I can’t walk off and leave that.” He looked around the laboratory. “Not that I’ll be around long—or maybe he’ll give me a night watchman’s job.”

The reddened eyes found mine again. “You haven’t heard of him having one of his phoney heart attacks, have you?” he asked. “Maybe if he’d throw one of his famous collapses

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he'd forget about me for a couple of days, long enough for me to get a few of these projects over the hump."

"I haven't heard of anything wrong with Victor," I said. "I haven't seen him but I assume Jean Samson would have filled me in if there'd been any heart attacks, phoney or otherwise. I talked with her a few minutes ago."

"Madame God?" Banner asked, his mouth twisted.

"Exactly what is her part in the Haggerty organization?"

"As big as she can make it," he said savagely. "Her job is to push. The projects and people she approves of get pushed ahead—those she doesn't approve of, like me, get pushed face-down in the mud. A machine. You wonder how a creature with a face and build like her's can hate being a woman so much." He peered at me. "You know Jean Samson's greatest sorrow? That she doesn't have to shave or wear a jockstrap when she goes swimming."

"You mean she's queer?" I asked in a shocked voice.

"Hell, no, not even that. A machine. A goddamn computer that feeds on figures and spills out orders that destroy anybody or anything that doesn't make the going profit percentage for Haggerty Industries. A frigid machine."

"Aren't you being a little hard on the gal?" I asked. "From what she told me, she cozied up to Beau Sparrow once in a while."

He grunted. "Did she tell you that?" he asked, scornfully. "I didn't like that guy much but I will give him credit for telling Samson to go play with her cost sheets." He gave a mirthless laugh. "He told me about it—she did everything but climb into bed with him but Sparrow thought she was about as desirable as a—an adding machine."

"Well, how about Dr. MacLean?" I asked.

Banner nodded. "Well, yeah, they got along fine. I guess they got their kicks out of talking about operations that went wrong or something like that. It's hard to figure, a man like MacLean who looks as though he enjoys women the way

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they were meant to be enjoyed, wasting any time with that female zombie, but every man to his taste, I suppose. Maybe he's just trying to find out what makes her tick." He laughed again. "Or maybe he's working on the medicine that's going to make every frigid woman in the country hot stuff, overnight."

"Do you know MacLean well?" I asked.

"All I know about him is that he's a big society doctor making a lot of dough off patients like Victor Haggerty," Banner said. Then he made a gesture with his big hand and added, "But I've got to admit that when Mrs. Haggerty had her trouble, when she caved in, MacLean worked night and day with her, bringing her out of it."

I marked the soft note that came into Banner's voice when he mentioned Liz and I asked, "You and Mrs. Haggerty were good friends?"

He started to say one thing and wound up shaking his head and saying something different. "I've met her maybe half-a-dozen times. She was—she was nice to me. When Haggerty first rescued me, after the Gorgon Project went bad and nobody else would even talk to me on the phone, he had me out there to dinner a few times." His hung-over eyes held mine in something close to a desperate appeal for understanding. "Sure, I was grateful to Haggerty, I knew the chance he was taking on me, but goddammit, he didn't have to remind me that I was a blacklisted lush every other breath, did he?"

"And Liz, Mrs. Haggerty—?"

"She treated me like a human being, that's all. Sure, I'd taken a bad fall but somehow she let me know that I'd been up there once and—well, I didn't have to grovel, no matter how bad a flop the Gorgon job was. I can't explain it because I never was much good with words but I was—I guess I was more grateful to Liz Haggerty than I was to Victor and his Norelec presidency which didn't mean a

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goddam thing, actually, as far as authority went, and his good salary and even the chance to keep on with my work.”

I nodded. I could understand that. Then I harked back to something he'd said earlier. “You didn't care much for Beau Sparrow. How well did you know him?”

The thick shoulders hunched under the white gown. “Look, he was an artist and I'm an engineer—we didn't know what the other guy was talking about, half the time. MacLean said he was painting a picture of Mrs. Haggerty and it was helping her to get over whatever was ailing her so I was all for Sparrow on that account. Then he came down here—”

“Here, to Norelec?” I asked.

He nodded. “Yeah, MacLean got Haggerty to pass him in. There was something about Sparrow getting the job of painting a picture of the lab for institutional advertising—you know, projecting the image of Victor Haggerty giving his all to make American space programs better than anybody's? I wondered why they didn't send in a photographer but the advertising man said it wouldn't be classy enough; we needed something more dignified than the forty-thousand missile blast-off pictures that everybody's using, from girdles to chewing gum.”

I said; “Do you mean that Beau Sparrow came in here and painted a picture of this laboratory?”

“Hell, no! You came over the vacuum grill, didn't you? You know how careful we have to be about dust and other foreign agents—can you imagine a dizzy painter in here, smoking, slopping pigment and turps and God knows what-all around? No, I put my foot down, of course, and Sparrow had to be satisfied with the loan of some obsolete equipment and a fake laboratory we set up for him in one of the warehouses. He tried to work there but it didn't suit him. We moved the props to his studio but that didn't work,

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either. He tossed up the job after a while—said he got no charge out of pipes and tools and tanks and that jazz.”

“How long ago was this?” I asked.

“A couple of weeks, maybe a month.” His headache evidently reminded him that it was still there because he winced and pressed his forehead with the flat of his hand just under the Dr. Kildare cap. “Look,” he said, “God knows I want to cooperate with the police and all that crap but are all these questions necessary? I know I’m in no position to ask favors—not after bringing that Trampoboard out to Haggerty’s and making myself Suspect Number One—but I really am anxious to get as much work done as I can before Victor starts swinging his axe.” He looked over his shoulder at the busy benches. “There’s so much to be done,” he muttered. “Because I lushed it up, shouldn’t mean that everything these men have worked so hard for should go down the pipe, does it?”

“I’m through,” I told him. “And thanks, Mr. Banner. You’ve helped a lot.”

He nodded absently, shook hands and took his hangover back to the bench where he’d been crouched when I interrupted him. In spite of all the apparatus and the men working them, the laboratory was a quiet place and so I could hear Banner ask the man at the bench: “Did they fix that oxygen input yet, Joe?”

6.

Back at the Homicide squadroom I found Tim Tilson, George McLeod and Les Hall waiting for me with the results of the day’s activities in the Beau Sparrow case, if it could be called a case.

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"How did you make out with Banner?" George asked me.

"He's suffering the worst hangover since Nero's but he told me everything I asked him," I said. "Of course, his answers might have been only his version of things, slightly distorted by stale alcohol, remorse and his fear of what's coming when Victor Haggerty gets around to demolishing him. First, I think we'd better check his claim that he flew to—"

"Port Arguello," Tilson broke in. "I did check. The NASA man I talked to said Banner showed up somewhat under the influence and was refused admission to the base, but he was there, all right."

"You got information out of NASA?" I asked in genuine amazement.

"Simple," Tim grinned. "All you have to say when they start asking who do you think you are, trying to get information out of *them*, is tell them that this is top secret, triple expedite, would they rather we held up action by having to clear it through Washington and what's your name, please? Works every time. As soon as I heard Banner claimed to have flown to Port Arguello I put in the call to check and it's like he says—or at least he was there."

"Does your foresight ever frighten you?" I asked.

"If that's a serious question, sir, I've been thinking about Extra Sensory Perception in criminology as an aid to —" Tim would have been off to the races in another second but George McLeod cut in.

"You and I must sit down and have a heart-to-heart talk on this fascinating subject sometime, Tim," he said. He turned to me and asked, "Did Banner give you anything you think we ought to know, Captain?"

"He gave me quite a lot but I don't know how important it is," I said. "See if you can find any goodies in it." And I told them everything Banner had said, right down to the last word. I was pretty good at this. If I ever had anything

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to recommend me for police work besides a love for the job it was my inborn ability to recount conversations word for word; I had total recall in that department even though I was as forgetful and absent-minded as the next man in other respects.

When I finished there was a silence and I asked: "Anybody come up with any case-cracking clues, as they say in the movies?"

Nobody had. Les wrinkled his forehead and said slowly, "Just throwing it in the mixmaster to see how it blends, there's one more connection between the death of Beau Sparrow and Charles P. Banner—besides the Trampoboard that went wrong, I mean."

"The oxygen?" I asked.

"Uh-huh," Les nodded. "It isn't much, but there it is."

"Oxygen!" Tim exploded. "What oxygen? I don't get it."

"Where's your Extra Sensory Perception?" McLeod asked. "Didn't the Captain say that Banner gave orders to have the oxygen input line in the Norelec lab fixed? Didn't Dr. MacLean try to save Sparrow's life with oxygen?"

"But—but—" Tim stuttered, "the coroner's report said everything MacLean tried to do was okay, even the adrenalin hypo in the heart. Where's the significance in Norelec using oxygen in their laboratory and the doctor using oxygen on Sparrow?"

"I didn't say there was any significance," Hall said. "I just said that there was a connection—call it a coincidence if you like."

"Well, hell, if we're looking for connections that vague, let's whomp up a whole passel of them," Tilson said sarcastically. "How about Banner's admiration of Mrs. Haggerty? Maybe he wanted to knock Victor off with the Trampoboard so he could save Mrs. H. from any more of her husband's punishment. Maybe he even planned on marrying the widow."

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Hall and McLeod exchanged pained glances.

"Banner seems to know a lot about Jean Samson and what she does after working hours," Tilson went on recklessly. "Maybe he's got it in for her because she turned him down when he tried to make out with her. Everything he said about her was angled to make it look bad for her. Same way with the doctor—"

"Hold on thar," Les interrupted. "The Captain told us that Banner okayed the doc because MacLean worked so hard to bring Mrs. Haggerty out of her collapse, remember? Outside of Mrs. Haggerty, MacLean was about the only one to get a good word from Banner."

"He's probably figuring on running around to MacLean's office and getting something to cure him of those shakes." Tim laughed, then sobered. "Hey, how about this? Banner was one of Sparrow's drug customers and when Beau put the squeeze on him, Banner decided to get rid of him by —" He stopped and shook his head. "No good," he said mournfully. "He still would have had to get Beau to step up on that Trampoboard and the Captain said Banner was fifty feet away from the pool when Beau made his dive."

Silence settled over us and we gloomily regarded our blank wall again. Finally I asked McLeod; "Anything new from the medical examiner?"

He shook his head. "The pathologists haven't been able to find a thing. The last I heard they were running through their list of exotic poisons, right down to curare. They're as much in the dark as we are."

"Did the fact that Sparrow may have been a cocaine addict mean anything to them?" I asked.

George nodded. "It meant enough to make them go back to the beginning, running the tests over to see if their earlier results might be changed. Nothing so far."

I got up and reached for my hat. "I might as well do the same thing, go back to the beginning," I said. "If you need

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me, I'll be at Victor Haggerty's little bide-a-wee. As all the great sleuths of history must have said at one time or other, I think our answer lies there!"

"Don't forget," George McLeod called after me as I headed for the door, "the killer always hides the stiletto blade in the hollowed out candle that's right in front of your eyes."

"Old stuff," Tim scoffed. "Nowadays, the stiletto's made of this plastic-with-a-memory that goes back to being a bottle opener when it's dropped in boiling water, right after the murder."

"Or you can always try Extra Sensory Perception," Les suggested.

"Boy, is this office ever going to be empty when I get around to firing the comedians," I said, and left.

FOUR

I.

Victor Haggerty was at *Versez Souci* when I got there. Worse than that, he was slouched in a deck chair on the terrace so that he couldn't help seeing me when Henry drove me up in the Rolls. He got out of his chair, came to the heavy stone balustrade and called down: "Hey, Burke, I want to see you."

I didn't want to see him, especially. I'd hoped to be able to get into *Versez Souci* without either Victor Haggerty or Dr. Ian MacLean knowing I was there. It was getting late in the day and if I was very lucky, Liz's pretty, antagonistic secretary, Ann Maxwell, would be gone, too, and perhaps I could talk to Liz alone with a minimum of interference from husbands, doctors and loyal employees.

When I saw Victor I knew that this was not to be. Of course not: whoever heard of Amos Burke getting that lucky a break? I told Henry to wait and walked toward the ter-

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race, reminding myself that, after all, my original assignment had been to find out who, if anybody, was threatening Victor's life, causing a letter to the Commissioner to be written over Haggerty's signature.

Victor's unwholesomely flabby face peered at me as I came up the steps leading to the terrace. "Did you know Charlie Banner is back?" he demanded. "You can find him at the Norelec plant if you want to arrest him."

"I've talked to him," I said. Because it might be easier to get to Liz if I could mollify Victor's perpetual bad temper somewhat, I put out my hand. "How are you feeling, Victor?" I asked.

He took my hand after a second's hesitation, then dropped it and turned to the chair he'd just gotten out of. "How would you be feeling if somebody tried to kill you with a gimmicked diving board and missed by a hair's breadth?" he grumbled. "Did you arrest Banner?"

"Well, no," I said. "In the first place, if we detained him all those Norelec projects he's heading up would suffer and the Russians might beat us to the moon. In the second place, we didn't have any charge to put against him."

"No charge? Are you nuts? He ran away, didn't he? What more proof do you need that he tried to kill me and then panicked when he missed?"

"He came back on his own," I reminded Haggerty. "He'd been drinking, he knew what he could expect from you because of this incident, and he ran without thinking. As soon as he sobered up, he turned around and came back." I took out my cigar case and unthinkingly offered it to Victor. As unthinkingly, he took a cigar, nipped off the tip. When I gave him a light he took a deep mouthful of smoke and blew it out again with the expression of one who savored something he had been missing for a long time. I got the idea right there that if Victor Haggerty could get rid of his hypochondria he'd have that much better a chance of becom-

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ing a second cousin to the human race. If he could smoke a cigar, take a drink, eat a good dinner, without worrying about lung cancer, liver damage or cholesterol in that order, he might in time be able to say hello without seeming to put either a sneer or a whine into the word.

He took a second pull at the cigar, exhaled and said; "I shouldn't be smoking this, you know."

I lit my own and said: "Neither should I. It's a senseless, untidy, expensive habit."

He held out the panatella in front of him and regarded it fondly. "Where do you get these?" he asked. "I thought you couldn't get good Havana since we broke with Castro."

"You underestimate the American tobacco growers' know-how, Victor," I chided. "These are Connecticut longleaf with a North Carolina filler, made in Tampa by Cuban exiles. If you like them I'll send a box around to you."

"Well, thanks; I'd sure appreciate—" Haggerty discovered to his horror that he was being humanly appreciative and shut off his thanks. "What're you people going to do," he asked in his usual, half-ugly voice, "let Banner run around loose to cook up some more schemes to kill me?"

I gave that question a couple of seconds to lie out there on the terrace in all its absurdity before I asked: "Victor, outside of the fact that every man is supposed to subconsciously hate his boss, can you give me one single solid reason why Charlie Banner would want to murder you?"

He waved the hand holding the cigar. "You don't know the story, Amos. Ever since I picked him up out of the gutter—"

"Was he really in the gutter?" I interrupted. "Or was he just temporarily in bad with the space people for fouling up the Gorgon Project? I mean, if you hadn't given him a break—and that was a fine thing to do, Victor—wouldn't NASA and the others have eventually reinstated him, providing he sobered up and stayed that way?"

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He glared at me. "I say he was in the gutter," he rasped, "and that's the truth, no matter what he told you. I gave him Norelec, a fifty-million dollar operation and—"

"And how's he done with it?" I asked. "Is Norelec up there with the others in the field?"

"Up there? Hell, if we're not twice as good as—" He stopped and stuck the cigar in his mouth to keep from praising Banner as Norelec's chief.

"Okay," I said gently. "Banner made good at Norelec. Outside of last week end's little spree, he's stayed sober and worked hard and now he's got some big projects at the point he calls on the verge. So all of a sudden he decides to kill you, so he gimmicks a Trampoboard and brings it out here to your place to do the dirty deed in front of a mob of people, knowing that when the thing kills you he'll be marked as the only possible person who could have done it."

"Whaddaya mean, the only person who could've done it?"

I explained patiently. "Look, Victor, a machine like the Trampoboard isn't a gun or a knife or a bottle of poison that a killer can toss into the shrubbery when he's through with it. According to your theory, Banner would have had to lug that thing to the pool with everybody watching him, put it down and wait for you to break your neck on it. After you'd done your triple somersault into the hereafter, he couldn't just pick up his Trampoboard and fade into the crowd, could he? It just doesn't make much sense, does it?"

He relished another mouthful of cigar smoke. "Well, when you put it that way, it doesn't," he grumbled finally.

"Okay," I said, "so we scratch Charlie Banner as a suspect—for the time being, anyway. We even accept the idea that the whole thing was an accident."

"Not me," he said, clamping his teeth down on the panatella. "You can't tell me there wasn't some dirty work going on at the crossroads when Sparrow got killed."

"Tell me about Sparrow," I said.

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"I don't know too much about him to tell you," he growled. "When Liz got sick—or after she started to come around, rather—MacLean said she needed some therapy to, hell, I don't know, help her get over the idea that she was useless, unwanted. He said having her portrait painted by the right artist would help. This Sparrow wasn't one of the big boys, you know, but MacLean had used him in similar circumstances and he knew just what to put on canvas to help the patient. That's what MacLean said, anyway; I thought the boy was a lousy painter, myself, but what do I know about those things? And it seemed to work, for a while, anyway."

He drew at his cigar and perhaps the rich smoke helped him say what came next. "I know what you think of me, Burke," he said. "I know what everybody thinks of me. Victor Haggerty, the man nobody would tolerate for one minute if it wasn't for his money. Victor Haggerty, the guy who mistreats everything and everybody he lays his hands on, especially women. You were Liz's friend before she married me and so I suppose you hate my guts for the way I've treated her, huh?"

"I never heard Liz say one word of complaint, Victor," was the best I could come up with.

"She wouldn't and she didn't have to, anyway. You made it plain enough, the way you looked at me, the way you stopped coming around, the way—ah, the hell with it. I never worried about not winning any popularity contests. I knew—at least I thought I knew—that Liz understood me and that's all that counted."

I couldn't keep the acid out of my voice when I asked; "And does Liz understand all about the Countess Orazzi, Victor?"

He looked uncomfortable. "Carina?" he asked. "Maybe—maybe that isn't quite as bad as it looks, as the gossips have made it look."

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"You mean they're wrong when they say you're planning on marrying the Countess?"

He shrugged moodily. "I may and I may not; I don't know."

"That big ring she showed me yesterday makes it look pretty official," I said. "*She* thinks you're going to marry her—or at least she did before this Beau Sparrow thing happened. And Liz, what about her?"

"Yeah, what about her?" Victor Haggerty asked. He looked at me and suddenly I saw that his eyes were neither squinted in suspicion or bulging in anger: they were, unaccountably, filled with desperation. "You ask her, Amos," he said. "You were her good friend. Why does she want this divorce, all of a sudden? Sure, I've been a bastard but she knew what I was before she married me and I thought—I thought she was the only one who cared a damn about me in spite of everything, regardless of the money. The other women—they didn't mean a thing and she knew it. When she got sick I—I wanted her to go to the best place in the world, Switzerland, Austria, anywhere, and have the best doctors work on her but she wouldn't move. She had an idea that I was trying to lock her up for keeps. It was pretty bad, Amos."

"So Ian MacLean brought her out of it by himself, with the help of Beau Sparrow's therapy painting," I said.

"Well, there was a lot more to it than that. Hell, the painting was never finished—Sparrow kept starting it over; he wasn't satisfied with what he'd done. That was all right with me. If it made Liz happy he could have kept painting from now till Doomsday. It wasn't the money, God knows. I'd have spent every nickel I owned to get Liz back the way she was once, loving me in spite of what I am."

I sat there beside Victor Haggerty's deck chair and smoked my cigar and tried to straighten out my thinking. I hoped it didn't show but the truth was that I was badly shaken.

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If there had been one solid truth in this whole setup it was that Victor Haggerty was an unmitigated louse: now, if I could believe what he'd just told me, his lousiness wasn't unmitigated, he loved Liz, he desperately wanted to keep her now that she was moving out on him. In spite of the fact that he was psychologically unable to show anything but an unpleasant face to the world, despite his talent for making people despise him, this one worthy love existed and its impending loss made him almost humble when he spilled his fears to me.

After a while I asked; "Victor, did this thing about Liz have anything to do with that letter you sent the Commissioner?"

"I tell you I never sent any such letter, Amos!"

"Nobody's threatened you?"

"No. If anybody tried to scare me I'd demolish them, or if they were too big for me to handle alone I'd go to the police. I've never hesitated in going to you people if there was something you could handle better than I could, personally, or my plant police could do for me on the quiet. You don't know anything about it but when I was a lot younger, little more than a punk kid, I got in a tangle with a blonde who tried to shake me down. I went to the police that time and even testified in court, no matter how embarrassing the details were."

"I've heard something about that case," I murmured. "Did the blonde really try to shake you down, Victor? Just between the two of us?"

He thought a moment and then shook his big head. "I don't know," he admitted. "I was drinking it up pretty good back then and you know how it is when you're young and you've got a skinful—or maybe you don't. Anyway, when I called in the cops I had to go through with it, didn't I?"

"To the point of having her sent off to jail?" I asked.

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He made an impatient gesture. "She was just a cheap little floozie, Amos. Name of Vicki Somebody. What did it matter? She was probably better off in the reformatory than she'd have been keeping on at the joint where I picked her up."

It was on the tip of my tongue to inform Victor Haggerty that the cheap little floozie named Vicki Somebody was now the glamorous Countess Orazzi but I resisted the temptation like a little man. If I lived to be a thousand, I'd never understand the kind of casual cruelty that Victor Haggerty took for granted as a sensible way to handle a situation but my job wasn't to moralize.

Instead, I said; "Think hard, Victor. Did Jean Samson ever say anything to you that indicated she thought you were in danger? Something you might have brushed off at the time?"

He popped his eyes at me. "Jean? What's she got to do with this?"

"Maybe nothing," I said. "But if you don't remember making a signature that our handwriting experts say is genuine, the explanation could be that Jean Samson slipped the letter to the Commissioner in with a stack of mail you were signing one busy day. She does that, doesn't she, gives you a lot of letters to be signed and picks them up for blotting as soon as you put your John Hancock to them?"

He nodded. "She arranges them on my desk with just the signature spaces showing," he said. "But, Amos, you don't think she ran in a letter like that, do you?"

"If she thought your life was in danger, yes," I said. "And I think she had reason to think that."

He looked at me, his mouth starting to curl back into the old sneer. "I told you—"

"Yes," I broke in, "and when Beau Sparrow took his dive the first thing you said was that they'd killed the wrong man."

"I never said any such thing!"

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"Yes, you did, Victor. It came out involuntarily, but that's what you said. Now, who is *they* and if Sparrow was the wrong man, weren't you the one *they* were out to kill—isn't that why you turned on Charlie Banner like a cornered mink?"

He tried to bluster, deny everything, go back to being the Victor Haggerty who over-rode everybody by sheer force of offensiveness, but it didn't come off. Right in the middle of his blare and blather his voice crumpled and he muttered, almost sobbed:

"It's crazy, Amos, but lately I've had this terrible suspicion that Liz was trying to get rid of me for my money—so she and Beau Sparrow could have it all, instead of just the divorce settlement."

2.

"Beau Sparrow!" I said. The name must have exploded from me. "You mean you thought Liz was in love with Sparrow?"

Victor Haggerty nodded miserably. "I know it sounds crazy but—but she wouldn't see me, and that boy with his good looks and the way he could get along with everybody, she was never too sick or too busy to see him. At all hours, Amos—you know no artist can paint a portrait in lamplight at midnight."

"Didn't you object?" I asked. "I know this was part of her therapy but midnight sittings—after all!"

"MacLean said to humor her," Victor told me. "He said that after a person's been as sick as Liz was there were a lot of idiosyncracies that had to be pampered—something like a pregnant woman wanting pickles and ice cream in the

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middle of the night. MacLean said that Liz was—what was it?—searching for her lost ego and if Beau Sparrow reminded her of the time she was a sought-after girl, all to the good.”

He paused and added heavily; “And then I got the note.”

“What note?”

“I don’t know who wrote it. I wish I did; I’d strangle the sonofabitch. It came in the mail one day here at home and it asked me when I was going to get wise—if I thought Beau Sparrow was just painting my wife’s picture, all I had to do was walk in on them sometime and I’d find out different.”

I asked, “Did you ever walk in?”

He shook his head. “No, I didn’t. Maybe I was afraid of what—” He stopped talking, considered and said, “I trusted Liz too much for that.”

“Did you get more anonymous notes telling you that Liz and Beau were planning to kill you for your money?” I asked.

Another headshake. “No. That idea—I don’t know where that came from. Out of my crazy mixed-up head, probably.”

“Who mixed it up for you?” I asked.

He didn’t say anything but I had an idea. As a matter of fact, the whole lousy schmear was coming to light. No deduction, you understand; you just put what you knew together with what you didn’t know but which was logical to assume and you had something. Maybe.

“I want to see Liz,” I told Victor.

He turned in his chair to look up toward the second floor of the big house behind him, toward the window where I’d seen Liz’s gaunt and ravaged face the day before. “It’s been a long time since she’s received any callers besides Beau Sparrow,” he said, almost wistfully, “but you can try. Ann Maxwell will tell you whether Liz will see you.” His mouth twisted in a crooked line. “It seems forever since the Max-

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well woman or Doc MacLean or some damn nurse or other hasn't been there at the door to tell me I couldn't see my own wife."

I could have told him that there had been plenty of times in the past when he could have seen Liz, when she had sat there alone in the middle of all that atrocious display of bad taste, her old friends driven away by his evil-tempered boorishness, and he had been too busy or too thoughtless or just to mean to comfort her. These things I knew, not from anything Liz had ever told me during that brief time when I visited *Versez Souci*, but from other friends who had put up with Haggerty until they were finally dealt the unforgivable insult or subjected to the unforgettable embarrassment and gave up the uneven battle.

I could have reminded Victor of this but again I told myself that I was there primarily as a police officer, a captain of Homicide, and only incidentally as Liz's old friend. My job was to find out, if I could, whether Beau Sparrow's death had been an accident or murder; to balk any threat to this strange misanthrope, Victor Haggerty, if there really was such a plot; and to see that the criminal, murderer or would-be murderer, got what he deserved.

"I take it Miss Maxwell is still with Liz, then," I said to Victor.

He nodded. "She's been staying nights, lately. MacLean figures it's better for Liz to have her there. This Sparrow thing has set her 'way back, MacLean says, and he doesn't want her to alone for a minute, not till she gets over the first shock, anyway."

"How about the nurses you mentioned?"

He shrugged. "MacLean tells me Liz has developed a thing about nurses but she likes Ann Maxwell. She's more than a secretary, really; more of a companion or even a younger sister sort of thing. We're lucky to have her. She doesn't mind working any and all hours for Liz, even though she

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hates my guts and never misses a chance to show me she does."

I remembered Haggerty's outburst of the previous afternoon, right after Sparrow was killed, when he said something about Liz and her "smart young secretary" possibly planning to smuggle "the gigolo's" funeral expenses into the household accounts, a purely vicious remark. Now he showed a sort of grudging gratitude for this same "smart young secretary's" help to Liz in her trouble. A strange complex of lacks and impulses impossible for me to understand was Victor Haggerty, one of the world's richest men and yet miserable in his inability to love or be loved—with one exception, according to his story, and that was Liz.

I told Haggerty I'd probably want to see him before I went back to town and then walked to the nearest doorway. Victor made no offer to go inside with me; he stayed where he was, slumped in the deck chair, moodily drawing at the cigar which had long since gone out. The butler, Morgan, whom I'd seen the day before, answered my ring.

"Mrs. Haggerty?" he asked in surprise when I said I wanted to see Liz. "I don't believe—well, I'll see if she's feeling well enough to see you, Captain Burke. Perhaps you'd like to talk to her secretary, Miss Maxwell?"

"I'd rather talk to Mrs. Haggerty," I said. "If you don't mind, I'll go along with you, Morgan." My tone told him I was going along with him even if he did mind; I didn't intend to stay there in the lower hall with my left ear in my hand while Ann Maxwell sent word that, sorry, but Mrs. Haggerty wasn't well enough to see anyone, I could try some other time if I liked or just do the sensible thing and stop bothering the poor woman.

Morgan looked a bit upset but he remembered the badge I'd shown him and decided that this was out of his hands, I was police. I followed him down the main entrance hall and then up the sweeping stairway to the landing where

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I'd been waylaid the previous day by Mr. MacLean and Ann of the angry eyes. The butler turned right and we walked down the heavily carpeted hall to the door at the end. There Morgan raised his knuckles and rapped discreetly.

There was no answer and the butler rapped again.

"Yes?" It was Maxwell's bright young voice.

"It's Captain Burke, Miss Maxwell. He wishes to speak with Mrs. Haggerty."

"Tell him she can't come to the phone, Morgan. If he wants to leave a number I'll call him back and—"

"Not the telephone, Miss Maxwell." Morgan sounded as though he wished he were someplace else, preferably in the next county.

"You mean he's here, in the house?"

I stepped in front of the butler and went official with the voice. "He's right here outside the door, Miss Maxwell," I said.

There was an exclamation, *sotto voce*, and the secretary began: "You should have phoned, Captain. I could have told you that Mrs. Haggerty couldn't possibly—"

"I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I have to insist," I broke in. I reached for the knob and twisted it a couple of times. "I hope you're decent, Miss Maxwell, because I'm coming in there in about three seconds."

That did it. The door flew open and Ann Maxwell came out into the hall, shutting the door behind her. Her mad had a fast pickup: in the few seconds that had passed since I'd first spoken she'd revved herself up real good.

"I hardly think that even you would dare break into a sickroom, Captain Burke," she snapped.

"I hoped I wouldn't have to," I told her, "but I've done worse than that when it was important enough. And believe me, Miss Maxwell, it's very important that I see Liz."

"Liz?" Her eyebrows were up and the corners of her pretty mouth were down.

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"Uh-huh, Liz," I nodded. "I thought I explained it to you yesterday. Mrs. Haggerty and I are old friends. I call her Liz and she calls me Amos. That's why I know she wants to see me." I started to reach for the doorknob again but Ann threw herself in front of it, her back against the door.

"This is outrageous," she said in a smothered voice. To Morgan she rapped out: "Go find Mr. Haggerty, Morgan, and tell him this—this *gentleman* is trying to force his way into Mrs. Haggerty's rooms."

"But Miss Maxwell, he's from the police," Morgan bleated.

"I don't care who he is," the angry young lady said with emphasis, "tell Mr. Haggerty—"

"Save yourself a trip, Morgan," I said. "I just left Victor on the terrace and cleared this with him. He warned me I might not have much luck getting past you or Dr. MacLean but I was welcome to try. I don't know about the good doctor but I'm pretty sure I can get past you. It might be a struggle but I'm game to try."

"Morgan!" she yelled. "Don't just stand there!"

The butler took Ann Maxwell at her word; he murmured "Yes'm" and fled down the hall, bound for the kitchen or wherever it is that butlers flee to when they want to stay out of a battle between a steaming secretary and a captain of Homicide.

I looked after the scuttling butler and then back at about a hundred and fifteen pounds of fury. "Now then," I said, "which will it be? Will you be a good girl and open that door, take me to Liz, or shall we try best two falls out of three?"

She seemed to have trouble breathing. "Of all the high-handed, uncivilized—" she spluttered.

"I know," I grinned. "A real stinker, that's Burke." I took a step toward her. "Ready or not, I'm coming."

I don't know what would have happened next, whether Maxwell actually would have tried to kick and scratch me

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away from her boss and ward or not, if Liz Haggerty hadn't chosen that moment to open the door and peer uncertainly out at both of us.

"Ann?" she asked in a quavering voice. "What is it? I heard somebody—oh, it's Amos Burke—isn't it?"

I'd been ready to see somebody far different from the lovely, vibrant woman I'd known as Liz but I still wasn't prepared for what I saw. I sucked in my breath and I may even have groaned aloud, I don't know, at sight of this ruin of a great lady.

She was skeleton thin but, more than that, her handsome face was raddled, her eyes were dark, dim smears where once they had been her best feature, warm, expressive, intelligent, beautiful. Her mouth twitched uncontrollably as she looked at me in doubt and fear. One thin claw of a hand came up to waver at her chin and then drop to her skinny throat again.

"It is Amos, isn't it?" she asked in that strange, unsure, reedy voice. "It's been a long time since you've called, hasn't it? I thought I saw you from the window once. When was that? It's so hard to remember things now, but I'm quite sure it was you."

"It was me, Liz," I said, and my voice emerged as a dry rasp before I cleared my throat. "Yes, it's been a long time since I've called—much too long. I'm sorry to hear you've been sick."

"Oh, but I'm much better now," she said with desperate earnestness. "Aren't I, Ann? Didn't Dr. MacLean say I was much better?"

Before Ann Maxwell could reply, Liz looked down at herself, gaunt and stringy in an unbecoming negligee that deserved the name of "wrapper." "I know I look a fright now," she said, and brushed at her front with a vague gesture as though trying to erase the unloveliness. She gave a feeble, twittery laugh. "You should have phoned to tell me you

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were dropping by for a visit, Amos," she said. "I'd have prettied myself up for you."

"You look fine to me, Liz," I lied. "May I come in and visit with you a few minutes?"

"Why, of course," she said. She seemed delighted but Ann Maxwell wasn't. The secretary scowled at me, her brows down over her brown eyes as she stood aside and let me walk toward Liz, putting out my hand to take the thin hand of this friend of mine whom I'd neglected because I couldn't stand her husband. The person to whom I'd let all this happen. Or would it have happened even if I'd kept on gritting my teeth and taking Victor's unpleasantness for the sake of Liz's friendship, if I'd not stopped going to *Versez Souci*? I thought not. As a matter of fact, I was pretty damned sure it wouldn't have happened.

Maxwell made one last try. "You must be tired, Mrs. Haggerty," she said. "Don't you think Captain Burke had better come back some other time when—"

"No," Liz said in her firmest voice yet. "No, if I let him go now there's no telling when he'll find time again to visit a lonely old woman."

She didn't mean to do it, of course, but she stuck the knife in me and twisted it with this reminder of what a faithless friend I'd been. Oh, I could rationalize, try to tell myself I'd stuck it out with Victor longer than most of her other friends, argue that a man in my line of work didn't have time for the gentle amenities that the next fellow might have, but my conscience refused to listen. I had plenty to make up to Liz Haggerty and if I weren't afraid of hamming it up I'd have thanked God that this Trampoboard thing—accident or otherwise—had happened before it would have been too late to make amends to this old friend.

Liz led me into a small sitting room and waved me to a chair. She took another chair, piled high with cushions, that stood near the window from which she had looked down

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on me the previous afternoon. Against the opposite wall squatted a big stereo record player and radio beside a large record cabinet. There were a few good pictures on the walls, a couple of watercolor landscapes and one small still life in oil, a Russell Robinson, but no sign of the portrait Beau Sparrow had been doing. The door leading to the bedroom was ajar and I saw that the light was better in that larger room, so I told myself Sparrow may have used that place for his sittings. I wondered if MacLean or Miss Maxwell or somebody else had gotten the painting out of sight since Beau's sudden death and if so, where it was now. I was very curious about that portrait.

As a matter of fact, I was exceedingly curious about the whole MacLean-Sparrow relationship. I wasn't up on my modern medicine, especially as practiced by a handsome society doctor who dabbled in psychiatry, but the use of a portrait artist, a cocaine user or pusher whose canvases that I'd seen were not worth the pigment daubed on them, as a therapist for a desperately sick woman seemed uncommonly odd to me. And according to Burke's law, anything uncommonly odd almost invariably had an important meaning when it was in the least connected with a criminal case.

"Now then," Liz Haggerty said as she settled herself in her cushion-piled chair, "give me all the news. I get out so seldom these days that I've lost track of everything and everybody."

"Well, let's see," I said. "What's there to tell you? When was the last time you went into town and caught up on the gossip?"

She gave a slight, uncomfortable laugh. "Heavens, I don't know when that was. It might have been yesterday or it might have been last year. You see, Amos, something's happened to me. My memory's practically worthless; it's something to do with brain damage, I'm afraid."

"Wherever did you get that idea?" I scoffed. "Why, you've

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got one of the best memories I ever knew. Remember how I used to say we could use you down at headquarters? I said you'd make the most charming lady cop on the force and I meant it: all you'd have to do would be sit there and look beautiful and remember things for us mere men."

Her smile, which still contained a vestige of what it had been, faltered. "That was a long time ago, Amos," she said, a little sadly.

"Not so long, Liz," I said. "And the offer still goes. As soon as the doctor gives the okay we'll see about getting you fitted for a uniform—they're real chic since they called in that top designer to give our gals some style—and we'll—"

"Captain Burke," Ann Maxwell broke in harshly, "are you really so obtuse or are you being deliberately cruel?"

I looked at the secretary but not before I saw Liz's eyes, puzzled, hurt, apprehensive.

"Obtuse?" I asked. "Deliberately cruel?"

"Didn't Dr. MacLean explain—" the girl began and then broke off. "Never mind. I'll speak to you later."

"What is it, Ann?" Liz asked. All trace of returning animation was gone from her voice. "What did you start to say about Dr. MacLean telling Amos something about me?"

Ann used the voice that certain knotheds believe is necessary when speaking to children, old people and very sick patients. "It's nothing, Mrs. Haggerty. Really it isn't. You mustn't worry yourself. Remember what the doctor said about not worrying about anything."

And she had asked me if I were obtuse or cruel! This pretty girl with the brown eyes was telling Liz Haggerty in so many words that she, Liz, would be wearing a strait jacket if she ever left these rooms alive. And Liz got the message, all right; I could see her shrivel within herself, lapse back into the old-woman wraith she'd been before my heavy-handed joking had started to bring her out of it.

Rage filled me and I wanted more than anything else to

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smash this lovely, shapely young woman who had done this thing to Liz, who must have been crushing Liz's spirit, bit by bit, for all these days and weeks and months while she posed as the fiercely protective secretary, companion, "younger sister" Liz couldn't do without.

There were two ways to explain Ann Maxwell. One, she was so infatuated with the handsome Dr. MacLean that she did everything he told her out of blind adoration or, two, she was MacLean's good right hand and in this plot to wreck Liz Haggerty's mind and life as deeply as he was.

And yes, there was a third explanation: Liz could be hopelessly ill and Ann's grief at this knowledge had twisted the girl's thinking.

That was the chance I had to take, either that or shy off from the danger of inflicting real harm on Liz, a risk that everybody else, even her husband, seemed to have refused to take. For months, ever since her "nervous breakdown," Liz Haggerty had been secluded in these rooms, attended by MacLean and his nurse, Ann Maxwell, and—unbelievably—a narcotics addict or dealer named Beau Sparrow, and between her and the outside world had been erected the insurmountable barrier of helpless compassion that forbade others to interfere lest they say or do the wrong thing and hurt Liz's chances for recovery. While out of this well-guarded sickroom had come fragments, hints, rumors, that Liz, who had always been so right-minded, so honest, so *noble* in her loyalty to her unpleasant husband, had taken Sparrow as a lover and even wanted to divorce Victor so she could marry this handsome nobody from nowhere, this painter who couldn't paint.

If this weird character, Sparrow, had not stepped up onto that Trampoboard and been flung to his death (but not by fractured skull or drowning or heart attack; I had to remember that!) what would have been Liz Haggerty's

eventual fate? Real madness? Suicide? Or possibly a death as mysterious as Beau Sparrow's?

And why? That was the big puzzle. If evil forces had planned these things for Liz, what purpose did they hope to accomplish? Money? But Liz had no money of her own; it was all Victor's.

But if the Trampoboard really had been gimmicked and Victor had been the intended victim then Liz, as Victor's survivor, would be enormously wealthy (unless Haggerty's will showed otherwise) and all those corporations might fall under her control as principal shareholder and—

And Dr. MacLean had forbidden Victor to dive from the Trampoboard and so none of that fit at all.

All these thoughts flashed through my thick head in the time it took Ann Maxwell's false-hearted reassurances to bring a reaction from Liz Haggerty. I'd gotten through to Liz, I'd established the beginnings of a rapport, at least, and now I saw it crumble again.

"I do feel tired," she murmured, and made motions as though starting to get up from her chair. "Perhaps you'd better come back some other time, Amos."

"No," I said rudely. "I want to talk to you, Liz."

A look that came close to panic showed in her wasted face. "But it's time for my medicine," she said. "I can't miss my medicine."

"A couple of minutes won't make much difference," I said. "Liz, I've got to talk to you. When did you have this breakdown they've told me about—before or after Dr. MacLean first treated you?"

Her eyes were roving wildly about the room, seeking Ann Maxwell, anybody who could get her away from the need to think, to remember.

"I don't know," she said feebly. "Ann, dear."

"Never mind Miss Maxwell now," I said brutally. "You've got to answer me, Liz. It's important."

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But Maxwell was at the side of Liz's chair, her arm about Liz's shoulders, the brown eyes bright with anger and defiance. "Captain Burke, if you badger Mrs. Haggerty any more you'll send her into hysterics and even a policeman would be kinder than to torture a sick old lady."

"Old, my foot," I exploded. "Stop making Liz sound as though she's ready for the grave. Or are those your orders?"

Her chin came up and her eyes glittered with pure hate. "What are you talking about?" She was not as pretty now as she had been; the hate drew lines in her young face and her voice was brassy but she still was a looker for an assistant murderer, if that's what she really was, and not just a fool.

"My medicine," Liz Haggerty wailed. "I have to have my medicine. Amos, please go away so Ann can give me my medicine. You were a friend of mine once—for old times' sake, please stop bothering me and let me have my medicine."

Ann Maxwell raised Liz from her chair, a Liz who had gone back to being a tottery, vague apparition. Over the invalid's shoulder, Maxwell's eyes showed triumph.

"I hope you're satisfied," she snapped. "Now that you have Mrs. Haggerty completely upset, perhaps you'll be good enough to leave so I can give her her medicine and try to quiet her down."

I saw I'd get nowhere. Liz might really go into hysterics and in her condition that could be damned dangerous. I got out of my chair and headed for the door, feeling tired and defeated.

"Okay," I said. "I'm sorry if I've upset you, Liz. I'll be back to see you when you're feeling better."

"Please do, Amos," she said. "And I'm the one who's sorry I'm not—not feeling well. Please forgive an old fool."

"There's nothing to forgive," I said miserably. I took her hand briefly, sick at her fragility, sore at my inability to

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tear away with one swipe all the deadly spiderwebs that seemed to have been spun around this old friend of mine to shut her away from life. I could suspect, I could fear, I could damn the influences that I thought were deliberately wrecking Liz Haggerty, but I couldn't act—not without a lot more proof than I had now.

In the hallway just outside the door, I felt a touch on my arm and looked down to find that Ann Maxwell had followed me out.

"I owe you an apology, Captain," she said softly, so that her words wouldn't carry to Liz, inside. "I lost my temper and said some nasty things. You didn't deserve that. I know that as a police officer and as a friend of the Haggerty's you're only trying to help."

"Yeah," I said. "The heavy-handed cop with heart of gold, the diamond in the rough."

She said; "I wanted to explain that since the accident Mrs. Haggerty has been very ill and we want to keep her as quiet as possible so—"

I broke in, my voice deliberately raised over the girl's near-whisper. "Look," I said bluntly, "would it be against MacLean's orders if I got one little look at that portrait Beau Sparrow did of Mrs. Haggerty?"

Ann brought her finger up to her lips in a swift shushing gesture but my bellow had carried to Liz. She came up behind the secretary, her eyes more bewildered than ever.

"Portrait?" she quavered. "What portrait? Who is Beau Sparrow? Do you mean the young man Dr. MacLean brought here one time, a long time ago, Amos? I remember the name, such an odd name for a young man, Sparrow. *I, said the sparrow, with my bow and arrow*—that's how I remembered it. But what about a portrait?"

It figured. And Ann Maxwell's sorrowful stare, her half-headshake that was meant to tell me that, poor dear, Liz

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had lost even the memory of all those sittings for her own portrait, didn't change a bit of it.

"It's nothing, Liz," I said quietly before Maxwell could speak. "You take your medicine like a good girl and get some rest. I'll see you later."

Then I got out of there and let Ann Maxwell close the door behind me. I had a lot of things to do in a hurry.

3.

I called headquarters after I talked to Victor Haggerty for a few minutes. George McLeod answered the phone and I gave him, Les and Tim some jobs that needed doing, first and foremost of which was putting a tail on Dr. Ian MacLean, keeping an eye on his whereabouts and letting me know if he headed for *Versez Souci*.

"How about bringing the doctor in, Captain?" George asked. "Just for a little friendly chat?"

"No," I said. "We've had experience with doctors, you and I, and we know that a bad 'un can claim professional ethics as fast as a Red embassy attaché can holler diplomatic immunity. I want to catch MacLean with his pants down. Besides, there are too many things that still need answering. If we spook MacLean now he'll have a chance to cover up whatever tracks he may have left. Right now about all I've got on him is an amateur's opinion that he made a narcotics patient out of a well woman—that and my own sure conviction that Beau Sparrow never laid a brush to canvas on Liz Haggerty's portrait."

"Well, isn't that enough to hang on him?"

"George, George, that doesn't sound like you," I said

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reproachfully. "Remember MacLean—and Ann Maxwell, too—have built the image of a mentally ill person who can't remember things that happened five minutes ago. As for the narcotics bit, hell, I never saw MacLean give her dope. I suppose a police surgeon could find narcotics symptoms but MacLean could deny giving her the stuff and now that Sparrow's dead how could we prove MacLean had anything to do with it?"

"Ann Maxwell might tell us. Perhaps we could convince her it would be good for her soul to talk a little."

"Perhaps. And perhaps she's just a girl who's been completely snowed by MacLean, too. Remember, until recently she spent her nights at her own apartment in town. MacLean may have timed Sparrow's visits to happen when she wasn't there."

There was a silence and then McLeod said in a scratchy voice. "Well, goddammit, there must be something—"

"There will be," I broke in, "and the faster we get going on these side jobs the faster we'll have something to put on the good doctor."

"You want Tim to check on this Arthur Winfield first, you say?"

"Right. Get the emergency address in Canada from Banner and ask the Canadian police to get on it. It may be a phoney but even if it's for real, a hunting camp's a remote address, slow to contact, so ask them to step on it, triple expedite or whatever the term was that Tim used on NASA."

"You can be reached at Jean Samson's place in case MacLean makes a move or anything else breaks?" McLeod asked.

"Either there or back here," I said.

"You know Samson's home? Maybe she's—"

"No," I broke in. "I had Victor Haggerty call her at home and tell her he wanted to see her. She'll wait there for Haggerty, even if she wouldn't for me."

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"You got Haggerty to cooperate that much? Congratulations. See you later." And George hung up.

I went back to the library where Victor Haggerty sat, waiting for me to come back and fill in on the few things I'd let him know. He started in on me as soon as I came through the door.

"You sure you're right about this?" he asked. The old mean belligerence was starting to show again in his voice.

"There's mighty damn little I'm sure about yet, Victor," I admitted, "but if there's one thing I'd bet my life on, it's that your Dr. MacLean shouldn't be allowed to lay a finger on Liz. Don't take my word for it—call in another doctor, any doctor, and have him look her over."

He shook his big, round hard head. "Why, MacLean's one of the highest-priced men in town," he said as though that made everything all right. "I couldn't risk offending him by calling in anybody else."

I was fed up with Victor Haggerty again: that one brief glimpse of humanity he'd shown me wasn't enough to make me swallow this stupidity. "Listen, Victor," I cracked, "you've offended about everybody else in the world at one time or another, so why worry about MacLean? If I'm wrong, you can say I made you call in another man and I'll even apologize. But if those tender sentiments you told me before I went upstairs weren't all just talking to hear yourself talk, I should think you'd be anxious to get another doctor's opinion—I should think you'd have done it a long time ago."

His mouth curled in the old familiar sneer again. "Look, Burke," he told me, "I may not be as smart as you cops but if there's one thing I know it's doctors. And I say Ian MacLean is okay. If it hadn't been for him I'd probably be dead by now and Liz would be even worse off than she is."

I wanted to shout a good old blunt Anglo-Saxon word, loud and clear, but I didn't: what would it accomplish besides relieving me of a half-ounce of frustration and perhaps

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making Victor call Jean Samson to tell her that I, not he, was on the way to see her?

"Okay," I managed. "One man's doc is another man's mortician, to coin a phrase. Maybe before I'm through I can rub your nose in enough proof to make even you admit you were wrong."

I started for the door and the driveway where Henry still waited in the Rolls. At the hall doorway I turned and told Victor, "Just one word of advice, old friend. Don't take any of MacLean's medicine for the next few hours—not even if you feel one of your so-called heart attacks coming on. Just tough it out. You might find it healthier."

His answer followed me through the door. "Don't tell me how to take care of my health, Burke," he cried. "You're just down on doctors, that's all—you must be one of these radical socialized-medicine nuts!"

As I'd told George, Victor had called Jean Samson at her apartment, telling her he wanted to see her, so I was fairly sure she'd be home. Unless, of course, she was up to her well-formed knees in this mess and had taken off on a Canadian hunting trip of her own.

She hadn't. She answered the doorbell of 3-C in what undoubtedly was one of the most expensively priced apartment houses ever occupied by a working girl not a member of the world's oldest profession, an address aspired to by high-salaried executive bosses of working girls. Because the Burke interests included some comparable properties on the same avenue, I judged the annual rental of a little pad such as housed Jean Samson at twelve-five, not exactly a cold-water flat.

Samson was expecting Victor Haggerty and when she saw me in the doorway she came close to losing her refrigerated calm, perhaps even to banging the door shut in my face. To prevent any such unseemly lapse, I did a gentlemanly ver-

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sion of crashing the joint, placing my large frame between her and the jamb and moving smoothly into the foyer while I talked.

"Miss Samson," I said, "I had Victor call you because I had an idea that you'd be otherwise engaged if I'd called myself. And before you start saying *outrageous!* let me warn you that I'm fed up with the word and that I haven't got time to be the patient, sweet-dispositioned boy I usually am."

As I talked I moved through the foyer into a beautifully decorated living room lit by large, costly lamps and walked toward a white, upholstered leather bar set in an alcove. I noticed that Miss Samson had prepared for Victor's coming by mixing a large jar of martini's for herself and setting out a jug of Schweppes which apparently contained nothing in conflict with Victor's long list of allergies.

I suddenly found myself thirsty and, seeing that I couldn't make myself any more of an oaf in the icy Miss Samson's eyes than I already was, I helped myself to a squat tumbler behind the bar, dished up a couple of cubes from the drum-shaped ice bucket and built myself a large martini-on-the-rocks. I was sipping it and finding it exactly dry enough when there came the delayed sound of the hall door closing (so she hadn't bolted, as much as she may have wanted to at first sight of me) and the muted taps of her high heels on the foyer carpeting.

"Please help yourself, Captain," she said when she saw me at the bar.

"Why, thank you, I believe I will," I said, and sipped again.

She eyed me carefully as she came up to the bar beside me, letting me sniff her perfume, a more delicate mixture than the Countess Orazzi's but every bit as costly, if not more so.

"Mind if I join you?" she asked me acidly.

"Be my guest," I said. "Make yourself a stout drink be-

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cause I think you'll need it. But stay sober because there are several questions I want you to answer with a clear head and in all honesty."

She made herself a martini-on-the-rocks only a shade shallower than mine. She sipped daintily, nodded and turned back toward the nearest chair. Over her shoulder she said, "More questions? I thought I answered them all this morning."

"No," I said regretfully. "You didn't answer them all, not by half, and those answers you did give me were Grade-B. Now is the time for you to give me the Grade-A answers and all of them. No fairy stories about thoracic surgery this time, if you please."

She sat down in the chair and crossed her knees with a nice display of sleek legs, expertly maneuvered. She took time to sip her martini before she asked, "What if I say those were the only answers I choose to give? What if I ask to see your warrant? What if I refuse to say anything at all unless I have my attorney present? What happens then?"

I shrugged my shoulders, then tossed off my drink in a hurry. "Let me tell you what I know, first," I said. "Then you can decide whether you want to level with me or find yourself in the same jam that Dr. MacLean is in."

I gave her credit: her change of expression was hardly visible even though I was watching her closely. "I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about," she said.

"Let me explain," I said, and crossed the room to a settee that faced her chair. "First, we know that MacLean got Mrs. Haggerty on drugs, undoubtedly without her knowledge, and just as certainly with the help, tacit or otherwise, of Ann Maxwell and perhaps a couple of nurses."

She showed horrified surprise at that and it seemed genuine. "Good Lord," she breathed. "He couldn't."

"He couldn't?" I asked. "From what I know and from

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what I can guess, I'd say Dr. Ian MacLean is capable of anything if the stakes are high enough. And they were high enough here, the way I have it figured—destruction of one of this country's most important astronautical engineering laboratories. Yes, I think MacLean's employers would pay him very well for putting over a project that big."

After that one show of emotion, glimpsed when she heard that MacLean had made an addict out of helpless, innocent Liz Haggerty, Jean Samson's face went back to something close to its usual beautiful frozen mask.

I tried to shake her loose from her rigid control again. "And you knew that Beau Sparrow's real profession wasn't painting," I went on. "He was MacLean's dope supplier. He was the man who furnished the esteemed doctor with smuggled drugs. That way, no authorities could get interested in MacLean's excessive prescriptions for—well, cocaine in Liz's case; God knows what his other patients were dosed with."

"I knew nothing of Beau's connection with drugs," she said, her lips stiff.

"No?" I jeered. "Didn't Beau offer to share some for kicks when you dated him?" There was a wave of repugnance on her patrician features, instantly masked. "Or didn't MacLean tell you about Beau's role when he explained the whole goddamn filthy scheme and made you a partner in the deal?"

"I wasn't ever a real partner!" Jean Samson burst out. "I pretended—" She caught herself and sat silent, ashen-faced, realizing what that off-guard bleat had proved.

"So you pretended to go along, did you?" I asked softly. "He thought you were as cold-blooded as you look and he guessed wrong: he scared you. That's why you had Victor sign that letter to the Commissioner, was it? You were afraid you'd be in too much trouble if you warned Haggerty openly but you knew he was in danger—you knew the

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Norelec projects were in danger—so you called in the police over his signature.”

Her hands were twisting in her lap and she stared at them as though fascinated with their crawl and clutch. When she didn't speak I went on.

“Just before I came over here I asked Victor when MacLean told him to lay off the Trampoboard,” I said. “That had me stopped for awhile. If MacLean was the one behind this thing, why did he warn Haggerty off the Trampoboard so that Beau Sparrow, his own stooge, was killed instead? Then when Victor told me MacLean vetoed the diving exhibition about two minutes before I arrived, I got the answer.”

Her lips moved although her eyes stayed fastened on her fingers. “Answer?” she half-whispered.

“Sure,” I said with a confidence I didn't feel at all. “I phoned you for an invitation to the pool party. You knew who I was—Victor must have told you I was with Homicide even if the name wasn't familiar, and you were expecting somebody from the police, of course. I came to *Versez Souci* that afternoon in the Rolls and that's become a sort of trademark; I'm the cop who rides to work in a Rolls. You knew I was coming and when you saw the Rolls coming up the drive—which can be seen from the pool—you told MacLean that here came Burke, Captain of Homicide; you gave him an oblique warning not to pull anything on Victor, not with a cop standing right over him.”

Her eyes came up, haggard and stricken. “I swear to God I didn't know anything about that diving board,” she said in a low voice.

“Perhaps you didn't,” I agreed. “It was one of Victor's show-off whims; he'd amaze everybody with this gadget designed by one of Charlie Banner's bright young engineers, a man named Arthur Winfield. Tell me about Winfield, Jean.”

She was silent for so long that I thought she wasn't

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going to tell me anything and for a second I was afraid I was going to blow the bit. Unless Jean Samson talked or MacLean made a reckless move, all I had was a charge of breach of ethics, malfeasance or some other such relatively innocuous complaint to throw at the doctor. Unless we could find Winfield in Canada, bring him back and make him talk (and I had the idea we'd lost Winfield; he had too big a headstart on us) we had almost nothing, without Jean.

So I waited, my heart sinking with all hands, and when she spoke it was as though angels blew silver trumpets, even though her voice was low and rusty. "I ran down what we had on the Trampoboard, of course, the first chance I got," she told me. "I found it was Winfield's own little after-hours project, a—a plaything, a gag. When I heard he was missing, I had a security check run on him. A couple of things turned up wrong right away. I'm afraid he—he—" She stopped talking and her head sank lower.

"Look, Jean," I said after another wait, "I know you sent that letter to the Commissioner. I know you want to be on our side now, even though you may have been tied up pretty tight with the enemy, even tighter than you're willing to let on, even now. So do you want to do something about clearing the slate and telling me how it happened or do you want to play it the other way, call your lawyer, give the other side the time they need so they can get away with these things they've done and plan to do and go off somewhere to laugh at the stupid Yankees?"

Her head came up and she looked at me. Then she turned her face away but not before I saw that the steel and ice was gone completely and in its stead there was shame and guilt and fear.

"I can't," she muttered. "It's all so—so humiliating."

"Maybe I can help," I said. "Maybe it started when you

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dated Beau Sparrow. Maybe he got you mixed up in this. Right?"

She started to shake her head and then nodded. "Yes," she choked. "Beau—I've always had miserable luck with men, Captain. Even when I was a young girl the boys I fell for turned out to be nasty, grasping, selfish beasts, all out to make a fool of me. The same thing with men when I got older. Beau was different—or he seemed different; I know now he was under MacLean's orders to charm me, make me feel like the most desirable woman alive."

She hesitated but now that she'd started it came easier for her. "I really did think he was a promising young artist, nothing more," she said. "He showed me some work he said was his but—but I guess what he showed me was copied or even somebody else's work, signed by him. Anyway, it doesn't matter. He was—nice to me and I thought he loved me even though he was supposed to be engaged to that countess."

The next part took some telling but Samson came through bravely. "I—I guess the proper term is I fell for him. We had a couple of dates, dinner, the theater, amusing, friendly, a little more romantic each time, and then one evening he invited me to a dinner he would cook himself, a pilau that was his specialty. At a friend's apartment, because he didn't have a real kitchen at his bachelor flat. We had a couple of cocktails before dinner and"—she gave a short, harsh laugh—"I thought drugged drinks went out with Gay Nineties seductions but that was what must have happened. Or perhaps Beau Sparrow was an expert at that sort of thing and didn't need drugged drinks; I don't know. Anyway, suddenly everything was too romantic to let inhibitions, the old cautions, interfere. This was true love come at last, the way I thought it was going to be when I was a wide-eyed child." He voice was bitter enough to make me wince and I certainly was no wide-eyed child.

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She paused and took a sip of her drink as though she needed more courage to get on with it. I tried to give her a helping hand along the way.

"And the whole set-up was a frame?" I suggested, as kindly as I knew how. "The Prince Charming turned out to be something else, a louse who'd planned all along to get you in what used to be delicately referred to as a compromising position so he could put the screws to you?"

A poor choice of words but it was too late to call them back. She was nodding drearily. "Not Beau—his job was finished when—when the tender scene was over," she said. "That was when his friend who had lent us his beautiful apartment came onstage. Oh, very smooth, very regretful that such things had to be, but it seems he was a camera nut and he had this super-super sixty-second print camera that worked on an infra-red light and would I like to see the results?" Her eyes came up and something, not the martini, had given her the courage she hadn't had before, not this evening or when the blackmailer had displayed his pretty pictures.

"It was Ian MacLean," she said with something of her old calm. "I—at first I thought he must be some kind of ultra-sophisticated deviate: I'd read about such people—even knew of one or two women with too much money and too many thrills experienced too early in life who'd gone in for—well, never mind; it doesn't pertain. Ian MacLean was no deviate, of course. He was a businessman with something to sell, those hideous pictures, and at an exorbitant price." She paused and said heavily: "Treason."

I was so surprised that I grunted. I hadn't expected that MacLean would be so open about his main purpose so soon, not with his opening gambit to the woman he'd just gaffed with those photographs. Jean Samson caught my exclamation and hurried on to explain.

"Oh, not the ultimate treason, at first," she said. "Merely

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the double-crossing of Victor Haggerty so that Norelec would start to curl up and die. MacLean had sound, reasonable explanations of why this would be desirable—even patriotic. Under Victor's top direction, Norelec was starved for operating funds, research money, and could never realize its tremendous potential. So let the company appear to hit the skids, let Victor get rid of it as he was sure to when he read the balance sheets. Then certain people would take over who would make Norelec what it ought to be, the prime factor in America's space program." She paused again. "And I'd be head of the reorganized company in title—and salary—instead of just pulling the strings in Victor's name."

She raised her glass, found it empty and offered it to me silently. I went to the bar to make her a refill and she talked while I was doing the necessary.

"Once I got over the first shock," she said, "I admit I was tempted. I'm an ambitious woman, Captain Burke, ruthlessly ambitious. I was in a bind and I told myself that I had the right to use any means at hand to get myself out of this position. Was betraying Victor Haggerty so terrible? What had he ever done for me that I hadn't repaid him a hundred times over? If I was actual head of Norelec I could make the company—" she broke off and reached for the refill I handed her.

"And then that cold, calculating brain I've damned so many times came to my rescue," she said after her first sip. "I knew that if there wasn't a rotten, evil plan behind this reasonable explanation MacLean laid out for me, he would never had resorted to this particularly slimy brand of blackmail to force me to listen. I asked myself what the real scheme might be and how I could find out. So I—so I pretended to go along."

She drank again. "I put on the pose of a hard-boiled woman of the world. I said I was furious at the way he'd tricked me into this position but I'd pulled a few fast ones of my

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own during my career. I was a loser, he was a winner, and what happened next?"

"He fell for it?" I asked.

"Not right away. I nearly overplayed my part and it took some backtracking, some second thoughts, a lot of doubts, before he began to trust me."

"And Beau Sparrow, what about him?" I asked.

"Beau disappeared as soon as MacLean entered the scene and I never saw him alone again after that," she said. Her voice was loaded with her despal of MacLean's handsome, vicious stooge. "I doubt that Sparrow knew what was going on: he did what MacLean told him to do and took his money—doubtless to spend on his countess."

I told myself that Sparrow certainly hadn't known what was going on with the Trampoboard, otherwise he'd have let L'Orazzi's diamond ring stay at the bottom of the pool until it melted. I had a second's memory of the scene, Ian MacLean totally unconcerned, smiling over his drink as he watched his man-of-all-dirty-work step up onto the gimmicked Trampoboard that had been intended to throw Victor Haggerty to his death.

And again, in spite of all the truths that were coming to light, I asked myself how MacLean could have been so sure Victor would be killed? Why not just a bad fall, a broken arm or leg? Victor could recover from an injury, the subsequent investigation would have wrecked MacLean's plans, put Victor on guard, put a police and FBI watch over the man who owned Norelec.

Of all the people in the world who stood a chance of recovering from an accident, Victor Haggerty stood high on the list; Victor with his hypochondria complex, Victor with his pills and potions and even his portable oxygen tank for his imaginary heart attacks.

Even his own portable oxygen tank!

And as clearly as though I were back in the Norelec

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lab I heard Charlie Banner reply to a question from his secretary, the flat-chested Miss Miles.

No, the nitrogen's okay, my total recall memory said. Just the oxygen.

He had been speaking about trouble with the oxygen line serving the Norelec laboratory benches. And besides the oxygen line there had been a nitrogen line that was okay. And Beau Sparrow, Ian MacLean's grimy right hand, had been at Norelec, ostensibly to paint a picture to be used in institutional advertising and, according to Banner, they had mocked up a laboratory background for Sparrow outside the White Room, a setting Sparrow hadn't liked and which had been moved to Beau's apartment-studio. And there had been splashes of green paint on the studio floor although there had been none of that shade of green in the picture on which Sparrow had been working, the awful nude of Jean Samson.

"Jean," I said, "I'm going to break in on your story to ask a question. What do you know about the oxygen and nitrogen they use at Norelec?"

She wrinkled her forehead, puzzled by what must have sounded like the *non sequitur* to end all *non sequiturs*. "Very little, I'm afraid," she said finally. "I know it's used because I've seen both items entered on inventory. The central supply comes in bulk and there are portable tanks for experimental work in the field."

"Uh-huh," I said. "Do you know how the contents of the portable tanks are designated. Besides the lettering, I mean."

The brow wrinkles deepened. "Why, Victor used oxygen for his portable respirator and that tank's green. The nitrogen tanks are—yes, I know, because warehousing made a stupid mistake once and sent Victor the wrong tank. He was furious. The nitrogen tanks are dull grey. Why?"

"It would take too long to explain everything right now," I said, quietly although the excitement was rising inside me. "Right now, can I use your phone and where is it?"

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As if on cue there came the muted sound of a telephone bell coming from a stand just around the corner of the foyer. I went to it and lifted the old-fashioned French phone, a beautiful thing of gold and mother-of-pearl that I would have admired more fully if I'd had more time.

"George, Captain," McLeod told me. "Our man just called in and he's lost MacLean. The doctor left his apartment in what seemed a hurry and—well, there was a minor accident between MacLean's car and the tail's, one of those things, and our man couldn't pick him up again."

"Get out to Haggerty's place with the others," I said.

"Right. And the R.C.M.P. at Ottawa just came through to Tim. That hunting lodge address that Winfield left was a phoney."

"We're batting a thousand, all the wrong way," I said. "Bring a police surgeon along with you to Haggerty's. We may need him."

"Right."

I hung up and went back to where Jean Samson was sitting, her martini in her hand. "You can tell me the rest of it on the way to Victor's," I told her. "I'm sorry but you won't have time to finish your drink. We're in a bit of a hurry."

4.

Henry took the Rolls through town, nimbly, unobtrusively, at a speed that was about three times what it seemed to be. This was Henry's way. No sirens or red blinkers for us: Henry took pride in beating noisy cruisers to a scene of action without jumping one light or sending one old lady's

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DeSoto coupe up over the curb in panic at the sound of a siren.

While he drove, Jean Samson talked and I listened. Once she had started her story, it followed almost inevitable lines. First, MacLean had outlined a vague plot to hand Norelec over to certain interests who would make it a front-running aeronautical engineering complex with Samson at the head. Strictly a bit of big business intrigue, unethical perhaps, but nothing immoral according to our present-day mores. Then, as she gained the doctor's confidence, his plan began to change. Why take the chance that Victor might not dispose of Norelec when the company began to show big losses? Everybody knew Haggerty's unpredictability: he might smell the rat and ruin everything. Therefore (oh, smoothly put and sounding nothing like what it really was) why not eliminate Victor Haggerty entirely? With Victor "removed," Liz Haggerty would inherit and the doctor assured Jean that Liz would be entirely amenable to his every suggestion. Simple.

"But why did MacLean involve poor Charlie Banner with the Trampoboard?" I asked Samson as we rocketed along.

"I'm afraid I was responsible for that," she said. "I played my role too well there. I told Ian that if anything happened to Victor, Banner would move heaven and earth to involve me. He's always hated me, you know—or perhaps you didn't know. So I—well, anyway, MacLean said Banner would be dealt with when the time came so that he'd be in no position to make any trouble for me."

I didn't say anything but I felt a little sorry for Jean Samson, this icily gorgeous creature who said she'd always had bad luck with her men. She was telling me what I wanted to know now but one thing was becoming clearer and clearer: that "role" she spoke about had been for keeps right up to the time when she realized that she was on the verge of helping murder somebody. Until that sleepless night

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that must have happened, when she had seen herself with blood on her hands, afraid of every ring of the doorbell or telephone, finally walking into the gas chamber, and had tried to turn about, run from this horror, she had been ready to have MacLean do anything he wanted to, so long as she got the power and the money that were her substitutes for love. In her contrition she had written the letter to the Commissioner which Victor signed, calling in the police to stop MacLean, hoping against hope that this could be done without involving her; but her change of heart had come mighty late in the game.

She might think she made her story plausible now but when she got into court the prosecution would tear her to shreds.

As perhaps she deserved to be torn. I don't know. I don't judge them; I just try to catch them for somebody else to judge.

We went rushing up the driveway to *Versez Souci* and into the plaza where the Rolls' lights picked up one other parked car, a low-slung Isotta.

"MacLean," Jean Samson said. "That's his car."

I looked around for George or any of the others but there was no sign of them or of a department car. How long had MacLean been here? What had he been able to do?

I looked up at the great pile of *Versez Souci*. Lights were on in Liz's wing as well as the library where I'd left Victor Haggerty. The gardens and the pool area were floodlit but that meant nothing: one of Victor's idiosyncrasies was the night-long floodlighting of the grounds around his house—or, considering the circumstances, perhaps that wasn't an idiosyncrasy at all but a prudent safeguard.

"Wait here with Henry," I told Jean Samson and started away, then turned back. "I don't suppose this is at all necessary but, Henry, I wouldn't like the lady to go wandering around in the dark."

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"Yes, Captain," Henry said and his teeth gleamed in the semi-darkness. "I make sure she's comfortable right here, Captain."

If Samson had any reaction to this obvious lack of confidence in her good faith, I didn't wait to see it. I went up the front steps three at a time and tried the massive front door, found it locked, of course, and bore down on the bell. After what seemed a thirty-one-day month, Morgan answered.

"Mr. Haggerty?" he said when I asked where Victor was. "Why, shortly after you left Mr. Haggerty had a terrible attack, sir. A real one, this time. I called Dr. MacLean and he told me what to do over the phone before he got here. He just—"

"The oxygen tank?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. But I didn't know how to work it after I brought it up here from the pool house, sir. Mr. Haggerty never showed me how and he was unconscious. I tried but—"

"Where are they?" I yelped.

"In the library where Mr. Haggerty collapsed, sir. Dr. MacLean just arrived and—"

He was still babbling apologies for not having known how to work the portable oxygen tank when I ran down the main hallway to the library and banged open the door.

Victor Haggerty was lying on a couch with the mask over his face. Ian MacLean was standing beside him, a hand on Victor's pulse, waiting for it to stop beating.

The doctor was not one to panic; I had to hand him that. Even though he couldn't have known what we knew, the sight of a captain of Homicide barging in while he was in the process of murdering a man should have shaken MacLean a little but the doctor's handsome face didn't show a flicker.

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"Bad attack," he told me calmly. "Maybe yes, maybe no. Right now it looks like no."

I took long steps across the library, reached out and ripped the mask off Victor's grey face.

MacLean cried, "For God's sake, man!"

"He's had enough nitrogen for now, Doctor," I said.

He looked at me and I saw I'd cracked the genial, gentlemanly façade at last. His face didn't change perceptibly but his eyes showed their first flicker of fear. He'd been so clever, so secure in this involved, long-range, carefully staged plan that he hadn't considered the possibility that he might be found out; to be confronted with a cop whom he doubtless considered a bungling dilettante and to have this man say one word, "nitrogen," that told him everything had come apart at the seams must have been a terrible shock to Dr. Ian MacLean.

He recovered from that first instinctive panic but his voice didn't catch up with the rest of him. "Nitrogen?" he croaked. "What do you mean?"

I shut off the tank's main valve, used a fingernail to scratch at the green paint that had been Beau Sparrow's last art masterpiece. Even before I uncovered the grey enamel beneath the varnished green pigment, MacLean was saying, "Do you mean this tank was disguised to make it look like an oxygen container, Burke?"

"You ought to have kept closer watch on your boy, Beau Sparrow," I told him. "You should have known he'd leave one of those *In Case of Sudden Death* letters. Or did you think he trusted you, a junkie like Sparrow?"

I didn't dare look at him when I threw out this tidbit; I wasn't that good an actor to depend on my face not to give me away. Instead, I leaned over Victor Haggerty. He was still breathing but he looked in bad shape. I sure hoped that the police surgeon McLeod was bringing got there in

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a hurry and that he'd know what to do to bring Victor out of this, when he arrived.

I could try artificial respiration but I'd done that with Beau Sparrow and it hadn't done any good. What Victor needed now was pure oxygen before the nitrogen smothered him and how could I administer pure oxygen? Or maybe MacLean hadn't had time to give Haggerty as much nitrogen as he'd pumped into Beau Sparrow. That was about my only hope right then.

"The trouble with a scheme as big and as complicated as you had going for you," I told MacLean over my shoulder, "is that you have to depend on too many people to keep quiet when the pressure's on. Jean Samson, Ann Maxwell, Arthur Winfield—did you really think they wouldn't sing their heads off to save their skins?"

"They don't know enough—" he began, and then stopped.

"Oh, yes they do," I said. "And if you're half as smart as you think you are, you'll tell me what I can do to bring Victor around. The Sparrow thing, you might stand a chance of beating: it was no great loss when you killed him. If Victor dies . . ." I shrugged. "All I can say is that I don't mean to let you get away with *two* murders, committed while I was standing there looking on, so to speak."

I turned then and looked into his glare. He wet his lips, made a false start and finally got it out. "A deal?" he asked.

"Don't be silly," I told him. "Sometimes the D.A. makes a deal when we haven't got the locks on a man; he lets him plead to a lesser charge rather than risk losing him altogether. But I'm not the D.A. and we have the locks on you, MacLean. I just thought you might want to do what you could for yourself before it's too late and get Haggerty back."

"I—I don't know whether I can," he admitted. "That was a real attack he suffered, you know. After all this time of

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trying to get him to fall over and now—now he has to have an attack.”

“Too bad for you that you didn’t tell Morgan how to work the nitrogen tank,” I said.

He nodded although I don’t think he knew he did. “Lousy luck,” he said in a dull voice. “Lousy luck all down the line. First Sparrow had to show off on that Trampoboard and then when the butler could have knocked Haggerty off while I was still miles away, if he hadn’t been a dumb bastard who couldn’t turn a valve—nothing but lousy luck.”

“Sure,” I said. “Now how about getting Victor out of this? Or would you like some more lousy luck, like me having to detain you when you try to escape? Like smashing that pretty face of yours all up, just for kicks and because I’m fond of Liz Haggerty?”

The fear showed again. He couldn’t stand being hurt, this big brain who plotted the destruction of an important aeronautical engineering factor in his own country’s defense setup, who used dope and dirty pictures and oxygen tanks that were really nitrogen tanks to debauch and murder the ones who stood in his way of the money his Red friends promised him.

He shook his head and moved toward the medical case that sat unopened at the foot of the sofa.

“Adrenalin,” he said in a dead voice. “That might do it.”

“Be sure it’s adrenalin,” I told him. “I’ll be right here, remember.”

Sure, I was right there but I might as well have been in Timbuctu for all the good it did when he filled the hypodermic from a phial he plucked out of the rack in the bag, held it up to the light, then turned away from me, away from Victor on the couch, and stabbed himself in the neck with the needle, bringing the plunger down with his thumb in one last convulsive clutch.

The Nazi big shots carried cyanide pills with them in the

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late stages of the war so they wouldn't have to suffer the humiliation of defeat and capture.

Dr. Ian MacLean carried his cyanide in a phial stored in his medical case but the reason for it, and its results, were exactly the same.

5.

Victor Haggerty survived. The police surgeon who came out to *Versez Souci* with George McLeod got him over the immediate hump and a spell in the hospital did the rest. If you read the papers you see his name mentioned from time to time as the captain of industry, the financial tycoon whose prime interest, even beyond his wealth and his health, is making the United States first in space travel by the efforts of his famous Norelec executive vice-president, Charles P. Banner.

I'd like to say that his experience made a changed man of Victor but the truth is that he's as disagreeable as ever, dedicated to the cause of making everybody he meets want to give it to him, pow, right in the kisser. I have to grit my teeth to keep from saying bad words every time I go to the Haggerty's but I keep on going. Now that Liz is fully recovered from her long siege, I've sworn never to stay away from her so long again: old friends are too few to be neglected as I neglected her, letting Ian MacLean move in. God knows what Victor's new doctor might turn out to be under his charming bedside manner.

Jean Samson and Ann Maxwell are still serving their sentences, Ann a relatively short hitch, considering, because she turned government witness, all knocked out by MacLean's

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death. Jean got three-to-five; as I'd mentally predicted, the prosecution tore her story of "going along with MacLean to find out things" to small shreds.

When all the bits and pieces were assembled, largely through notes and letters found in MacLean's effects (many of them coded) it developed that while he might have been a high-priced physician, our Ian was also a lousy gambler. He had gone down the pipe for hundreds of thousands in everything from wildcat oil wells to the craps tables at Vegas and that's why he fell for the chance to make a wad as offered by that Certain Power interested in wrecking Norelec.

Briefly, the plan was something like this: once he had Victor's confidence, MacLean was to ruin Liz's health by feeding her fake vitamins and tonics which he convinced Victor she needed—something that wasn't hard to do with Haggerty's hypochondria. Then, when Liz fell ill, MacLean moved in, took full charge, declared that she'd suffered a nervous breakdown, imported Ann Maxwell and his own nurses, isolated Liz from everybody else and proceeded to make her a drug addict, using the narcotics supplied by Beau Sparrow, steered to MacLean by the doctor's new bosses.

Sparrow's presence at *Versez Souci* as a portrait painter had a two-fold purpose: he brought in the unregistered drugs and he also provided MacLean with "the other man." The doctor was the one who fed Victor all those reports of Liz's love for Sparrow, of course: MacLean and Ann were Haggerty's only contacts with Liz and they could tell him any lie they thought he needed to know.

What MacLean originally planned to do was literally worry Victor to death; the doctor, of all of us, was first to find out that Haggerty loved Liz deeply in spite of his insulting manner toward her. With his renowned hypochondria, it should have been fairly easy to combine Haggerty's mental distress with judiciously administered wrong-way medicines

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to bring about a heart condition that would require use of that gimmicked oxygen tank.

But Haggerty proved tougher than MacLean had bargained for and his bosses grew impatient, hence the recourse to Winfield's Trampoboard. Winfield, incidentally, was the Norelec contact who supplied Beau Sparrow with the nitrogen tank after MacLean snowed Haggerty into letting Beau get into Norelec: Victor would do anything for the doctor at that point. Also incidentally, Winfield got away. They almost had him in Mexico but he claimed political asylum in the Soviet embassy in Mexico City and was finally flown to Moscow.

When MacLean and Winfield set it up for Banner to be the patsy of the Trampoboard deal, MacLean's employers were doubly pleased; not only would Norelec be wrecked but one of the country's top astronomical engineers would be blamed for killing Haggerty, all in the same package. Neat, and it might have worked if (a) Jean Samson hadn't run scared and sent that letter to the Commissioner and (b) if Beau Sparrow hadn't been so jealous that he threw Orazzi's ring in the pool and then used the Trampoboard to go after it. Or if neither of those things had happened, something else would doubtless have come along to send the handsome Dr. Ian MacLean where he finally wound up.

I firmly believe this. Right has a way of making Fate work for its cause. Burke's Law.

"But what I don't see," Tim Tilson said, one evening when we were sitting around chewing over the case, "is why the coroner didn't pick up the nitrogen in Beau Sparrow. They said they tested for every poison known to man."

"But nitrogen isn't poisonous," I said. "That's what confused everybody. It's completely inert. It doesn't do anything."

Who Killed Beau Sparrow?

"Then how can it kill?" Tim asked.

I looked at George McLeod. "Do you want to tell him or shall I?" I asked.

George said, "You go ahead, Amos. As captain of this fine body of men it's only fitting that you should be the one to let light in on that immature brain. Besides, I don't know."

I turned back to Tim. "Air's almost eighty per cent nitrogen," I explained. "Breathing pure nitrogen leaves no trace because it doesn't put anything in; it only keeps out the oxygen the body needs to live. You remember the report said there was a congestion that looked like cardiac failure although the heart was in good condition. The congestion was caused by the nitrogen taking over where there should have been oxygen."

"I see," Tim nodded. "Simple, isn't it?"

"Sure," Les Hall said, "like Columbus' egg. But speaking of things we ought to know, how about that hi-fi concert Mrs. Haggerty was having that Sunday afternoon when you got to *Versez Souci*? Any reason for it or did she just like music?"

"Oh, yes, there was a reason for it," I nodded. "It never came out in testimony but Ann Maxwell explained that there were times when Liz regained lucidity in spite of everything they could feed her and when she did she screamed for Victor, she yelled for help at the top of her lungs. She showed signs of having one of those spells that Sunday afternoon, with the stage set for the big finale at the pool, so Ann turned up the hi-fi full blast to drown out any possible interruptions to the proceedings below."

I got to my feet as the mellow bleat of the Rolls' horn sounded softly outside. "And now I'll have to ask you to reserve your further questions till tomorrow," I told my three trusty cohorts. "I have an important job of work to do."

"I know," Les said.

Who Killed Beau Sparrow?

"You do?"

"Uh-huh. I checked with Vicki Vanoy, the Countess Orazzi, and asked her how about moving along before she started in again remembering how bad Victor Haggerty treated her and maybe getting some new ideas. She said she's going back to sunny Italy, flying out of here tomorrow. But she did want to say *arrivederci* to that nice Captain Burke before she left and thank him for the break he gave her, keeping her out of the MacLean case."

"As only the Countess Orazzi can thank a man," George McLeod grinned.

"*Che ragazza!*" Tim Tilson sighed. "Good luck with your good-byes, Captain. Don't go diving for any diamond rings."

"If there's anything I hate it's a smart-aleck Homicide Squad," I said coldly, and headed for the door.

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BURKE'S LAW

Taking things for granted is a luxury denied to members of the homicide squad.

When I got my cigarette going I asked, "What was it that killed Sparrow, George?"

George dragged at his cigarette. "The report only says what **didn't** kill him, Amos. There was water in his lungs but he didn't drown. There was a lot of congestion that looked like cardiac failure but the heart itself checked out a hundred per cent."

"So . . . ?"

"The coroner's office says there are still a couple of tests they have to run but from what they've found out so far, Beau Sparrow's physical condition was excellent—almost perfect."

"Except that he's dead," I said.

"Well, yeah, there's that."

